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# THE TRAMPLED CROSS

BY  
JOSEPH HOCKING

*Author of "All for a Scrap of Paper,"  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE SACRED STONES OF MOAB

BAMFIELD CAREW shrugged his shoulders somewhat contemptuously, nevertheless he looked grave. This was no wonder, for although the situation was not without its suggestion of humour, it was weighty with tragic issues. Certainly the faces of the dark-skinned Arabs and the wild look of fanaticism in their eyes told of their fierce determination that their conditions should be complied with.

"You mean to say," he said in good Arabic to the leader of the gang who surrounded him and the grey-bearded man by his side, "that my life will be spared if I renounce Christianity and accept your faith?"

"That is what I do say, my son. Out of our great goodness we make this offer—not only to you, but to the other. Ah, be thankful it is with me and not with Abou Bazouki that you have to deal. If he stood in my place you would surely die, you and the other; but I have a merciful heart, and I would save your soul. There is but one true religion, my dear; all others are false religions—lies, all lies. Allah spoke to our Prophet, and to him He revealed His will. We are your friends in what we ask; give up lies, accept the truth."

Again Bamfield Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"I am no Christian," he said. "To me one religion is as good as another. There is good in all religions; and I am not a Christian any more than I am a Mohammedan or a Buddhist. Therefore I cannot renounce what I do not hold."

"Ah, but that makes no difference. You are English, and all English are Christians."

"Oh, very well, seeing you know better than I," replied the young man, with a kind of a grimace.

"I say you must be," said the Arab impatiently. "Every man must have his religion, and the true faith is not to be

found in your country. It has been told me again and again that in England all are Christians. Besides, what have you come to our country for? You come to steal our sacred things. You lay your infidel hands on our sacred stones, and it is written in our law that an infidel who does this ought to die. But it is not for me to argue. I am of the true faith, therefore it is for you to obey. Thus, if you would live, you must give up the wrong religion and embrace the true."

Bamfield Carew looked around him anxiously, and, occupied as his mind was with the alternative that was set before him, he could not help being impressed by the scene. Around him stretched a wild, sterile, mountainous country. Nothing grew but a kind of bleached desert grass, a few olive trees and a number of cactus bushes. The silence, save for the sound of the voices of the Arabs, was a silence that one seemed to hear. Away in the distance Mount Nebo lifted its giant head into the blue sky, a king amidst the host of lower peaks which were plainly visible in the light of the lowering sun. Many miles southward the rocky summits of Sinai glistened in the sun's rays, while northward snow-capped Hermon could be seen by those who cared to climb any of the mountains near. They were right away in the Arab country, many miles from the beaten track of European visitors. Indeed, from the first the young man knew that the mission upon which he was engaged was possibly perilous, although he did not seriously believe that any harm would happen to him.

Bamfield Carew was a young man of means and of leisure. It is true an editor of one of the London papers had arranged to print any articles which he might be disposed to write about his experiences during his visit to the East, but this arrangement placed practically no restrictions upon his actions. While in Jerusalem he fell in with some people who were interested in the operations of the Palestine Exploration Society, and became acquainted with a man who, although not officially connected with the society, was an ardent supporter of its projects. This gentleman, Sir Richard Winscombe by name, had been persuaded to visit Palestine because he had been led to believe that some hundred miles east of the Dead Sea there were to be seen certain stones which had a very important bearing upon the Pentateuch. Indeed, a Jew who professed to be converted to Christianity

had come to him with what appeared indisputable evidence of their existence, and of their supreme importance. It transpired later that this Jew had submitted his discovery to the committee of the Palestine Exploration Society, but the committee had decided that both the Jew and his discovery were frauds, and had dismissed him somewhat curtly.

Sir Richard, after having tested, as far as he was able, the value of the story which the Jew told him, decided to visit the East in order to see for himself whether the committee of the Exploration Society had not committed a profound blunder in discarding the man's alleged discovery. When Sir Richard's daughter, Joan, knew of her father's decision, she expressed a strong desire to accompany him. For Joan, although she was inclined to agree with the society's decision, was a girl of scholarly instincts, and had a great love for the bypaths of literature. Upon hearing of his daughter's wish, Sir Richard asked his sister, a widow named Marshall, who had lived with him ever since his wife's death, if she would also go with them.

The party arrived at Jerusalem towards the end of September, and arranged to stay at the *Mediterranean Hotel* while Sir Richard made preparations for his visit to the mosque, which stood about a hundred miles east of the Dead Sea, where the wonderful stones were to be seen. It was here that Bamfield Carew met the party. Sir Richard had known Bamfield's father as a young man, and thus a kind of friendship was quickly established. Joan Winscombe, however, was not favourably impressed by Bamfield, and had avoided him as much as possible. So much so, that when he had proposed to accompany her father on his journey of investigation she had decided to stay at Jerusalem during his absence.

As for Bamfield, he had at first little interest and no faith in Sir Richard's quest, but after being present at one or two interviews between the Baronet and the Jew he was less sceptical. Besides, he saw material for some interesting articles. The reason why Sir Richard favoured his going with him was because he spoke Arabic fluently. During his Oxford days Bamfield had become acquainted with a young Arab, and the acquaintance had resulted in his study of Arabic.

"There is no danger in the journey, I suppose?" said Sir

Richard to the Jew, whose name was Vacchelli.

"With a proper escort, none," replied the Jew.

"Even if I wished to take the ladies with me?"

"Perfectly. Of course, the journey will be off the beaten track, and it will be wise to have a strong escort of dragomen and servants; but there is not the slightest danger."

"I have heard that there are bands of robbers which infest the district," said Sir Richard, somewhat doubtfully.

"Bands," said the Jew scornfully. "Doubtless there are a few thieves, but there are no organised bands. It is not the kind of country for that kind of thing. A moderately strong guard is all that we need. I know Jerusalem well, and I can find a few stout fellows among the Arabs here, all Christians, who will keep a perfect guard."

"But the mosque itself where the stones are is governed by a fanatical sect of the Moslems?"

"Else the stones would not exist to-day," replied the Jew. "For more than a thousand years has that mosque stood there, and to many the place is more sacred than Mecca itself. But I know the Sheikh, and it was he who gave me facilities for my investigations. Indeed, he is more than a Sheikh, he is a kind of Sheikh-ul-islam, the highest ecclesiastical functionary for hundreds of miles around. Even as Father Abraham was of olden time he is to-day."

"And he is friendly to you, you say?"

"Else I should never have been able to tell you of my discoveries, Sir Richard. He showed me the stones on which are written the wondrous things I have told you of."

Sir Richard Winscombe's eyes sparkled with the joy of anticipation. If Vacchelli's information were true he would be able to startle the world. His name would be handed down to history, and he would be spoken of as one who, in an age of scepticism, absolutely demonstrated the truth of a great part of the books of the Pentateuch. He would be able to prove that Abraham was a real person, and that Moses did actually lead the Israelites from Egypt. Besides, the stones which Vacchelli had spoken about might only mean the beginning of other and greater discoveries.

Accordingly the preparations for the journey went forward, and as the days went by not only Sir Richard but Bamfield Carew became more and more eager to start.

Not that Bamfield's interests were identical with Sir

Richard's. Bamfield was a convinced sceptic, and, as he said later, one religion was the same as another to him. He sprang from an old Cornish family, and the branch to which he belonged had, in spite of the Reformation, remained Roman Catholics. They had been favourable to the coming of the Pretender in 1745, and had aided every attempt made to bring back the power of the Papacy into England. But Bamfield had from his childhood been of an inquiring turn of mind. His religious instructor as a youth had been a Roman Catholic priest who accepted the dogmas of his faith without question. No matter what the Church said, he believed it as a matter of course. He had no trouble with the pronouncements of Pius IX. Had the Church declared for the immaculate conception of Joseph and of the twelve Apostles, as well as that of the Virgin Mary, Father Banyon would not have demurred. He never doubted the miracles at Lourdes, the power of the Holy Coat at Trèves, or the wonders of the winking Madonna. He was a simple-minded believer, who believed that he was doing the will of God by accepting all that he was taught to accept without demur.

He was, as may be imagined, no scholar, and certainly not fitted to be the instructor of such a youth as Bamfield, who pelted the old man with questions until he was well-nigh distracted. The consequences may be easily conceived. Father Banyon's inability to deal with the keen-witted youth's queries resulted in the latter's mind being left in a state of chaos. According to the early bent of his mind he had supposed that the Roman Catholic Church must be the true and only Church of Christ, but the thousand contradictions which met him at every turn made it impossible for him to be a convinced Catholic. The Roman Catholic claim to be the one and only Church of Christ seemed to him preposterous. The more Father Banyon floundered the more bewildered did Bamfield become. At last the old priest went to Bamfield's father, and told him of his difficulty.

"He needs a cleverer and more learned man than I, Mr. Carew," he said. "He is a Thomas by nature, and I, unlike our Blessed Lord, am unable to say, 'Reach hither thy finger and behold My hands.'"

Mr. Carew had for some time seen the drift of things, and, being acquainted with a very clever priest, solicited his aid.

This priest, an Italian, had spent many years in Rome, and had also spent some time in America. He was the complete antithesis of Father Banyon. He belonged to what is called the liberal school of Roman Catholics, and was the personal friend of Dr. St. George Mivart. It is true he was not so outspoken as this eccentric genius, but he held practically the same views. Father Mussi was, indeed, rather a Greek pagan than a Roman Catholic Christian. To him the Church was little more than a medium for expressing his religious emotions in an artistic fashion. Historical sanction it had little or none. In private conversation with those whom he could trust, he spoke freely of Christian rites and beliefs as being merely the survivals of older rites and faiths, but that while little value could be attached to them by the educated, they were very useful and helpful, indeed necessary, to the ignorant. On certain occasions he even went so far as to speak of the Founder of Christianity as the "Christ-myth," and of His resurrection as a "necessary fable." His reading was prodigious. He had mingled freely with men of many nationalities and religions, and assumed an attitude of easy tolerance for differing forms of faith.

Bamfield Carew was not long in arriving at a correct understanding of Father Mussi's mind, and, as may be imagined, the understanding did not help him back to faith in the Church of his fathers. Indeed, it had the opposite effect, and by the time he had been a year at Magdalen College in Oxford he had discarded all religion. Old Father Banyon's teaching appeared to him illogical and absurd, while Father Mussi's was unreal and unworthy. He could respect Father Banyon; indeed, he did respect him sincerely, even while he could not help thinking lightly of his intellectual attainments. He at least was honest and sincere. But he could not respect Father Mussi. His position was not honourable; it was not candid; it was not sincere. Thus it came about that what fragments of faith he held when he came under Mussi's influence were quickly scattered to the winds.

He was now twenty-eight years of age, and had for several years held himself aloof from all Churches. Sometimes he languidly declared himself to be a Catholic, and that Church still claimed him as an adherent, but in reality he was no more a Christian than was Plato or Seneca. He held that

there was a morality common to all religions, which he, of course, respected ; as to the Christian story, however, it was a mere survival of an ignorant and superstitious age.

Personally, Bamfield Carew was on the whole a healthy-minded, clean-living fellow. He was much liked at Oxford, where he had taken a very good degree ; and although he lacked any great serious purpose in life, he was not guilty of the reputed vices of the young men of leisure. One of his hobbies was travelling, and as he wielded a facile pen his articles were gladly received by an Oxford friend who held the post of editor of one of the London dailies.

He had seen from the outset of his acquaintance with Sir Richard Winscombe that Joan Winscombe did not regard him with favour ; but this did not trouble him in the slightest degree. He was accompanying the expedition, because he loved adventure, and because he believed he saw a possibility of writing articles which would be of interest, possibly of extraordinary interest.

During their journey to the Dead Sea nothing happened. They were on the track of the ordinary tourist, and were thus well within the bounds of civilization. After having forded the Jordan, however, each felt that a new stage of their journey had commenced. All signs of European influence disappeared, and the drear loneliness of the journey from Bethlehem to the Jordan seemed as nothing to the grim desolation of the district beyond. Still, there appeared to be no danger. Now and then a stray Bedouin of the desert eyed them curiously and suspiciously as they passed, but they were not molested. Bamfield Carew could not help feeling, however, that in spite of a fairly strong bodyguard, it was possible that anything might happen. The East, he reflected was unchangeable, and the fanaticism of the days of Mohammed had not abated during the process of the suns. Those dark-skinned Arabs who gave them fierce, suspicious glances as they passed were comparatively untouched by the civilization of the West, and he knew that the fierce fires which burnt in their hearts long years before, causing them to cry "Death or conversion," burnt with as much ardour as ever. He noticed, moreover, that their Arab servants became exceedingly subdued. They no longer sang impromptu love songs as they led the pack mules along the stony tracks, but were silent, alert and gloomy. As for

Vacchelli the Jew, he was evidently filled with a kind of dread. His eyes, which in Jerusalem seemed little more than narrow slits, now became almost protruding, and when he spoke it was always in a fearful whisper.

"How long will it take us to reach Tel Moloch?" asked Bamfield of the dragoman at the end of the fifth day's journey from the Dead Sea.

"One day more and we shall see it," said the dragoman, and while Carew heaved a sigh of relief at the thought that the journey would soon be at an end, he was not free from apprehension as to what would happen when they reached their destination.

Still, he had no thought of abandoning Sir Richard Winscombe, who, as the days went by, became more and more excited at the thought of his great discovery.

At the end of the next day's journey they had come to a spot only two hours from the mosque, and it was here that Sir Richard decided to make his final preparations for his visit.

"Well, Vacchelli," said Sir Richard, as they alighted from their horses, "we have now got without mishap to the end of our journey."

"It is only two hours to the stones," said the Jew with pretending eagerness, although Carew saw that the man looked uneasy and nervous.

"And you say you can bring the Sheikh here to-night?"

"I will bring him here to-night," said the Jew.

"That is well. Get your dinner at once, my good fellow, and then get away with all speed."

"It is barely sunset yet, Sir Richard," replied the Jew, "and it will not be safe for me to go until much later, and then I need strong guard."

"Very well," said the Baronet, "wait till later then, and take a strong guard; but do not delay the matter longer than is absolutely necessary, for I am tired, and shall be glad to go to bed. All the same, I want to see this Sheikh before I sleep to-night."

"I will do everything, Sir Richard, everything," replied the Jew unctuously. Nevertheless, Carew could not help feeling that he was ill at ease.

Meanwhile the Arabs pitched their tents and made ready for the night. The place the dragoman had selected for

their resting-place was in a valley, and was so hidden that it was impossible to guess of their proximity until within a few yards of them.

"Are you tired, Carew?"

"Not a little bit."

"Ah, you are a young man. When you are twice your present age, young man, you'll not be able to sit in a saddle nine hours without feeling weary, especially if you have to travel through such country as you have been covering to-day."

Two hours later the two men sat together in the gaily-coloured tent which was used by them for a dining-room and lounge, smoking their after-dinner cigars.

"Not so bad for a desert, eh?" said Sir Richard, as he stretched himself in a comfortable canvas chair.

He had partaken of a good dinner, and now felt refreshed. "I am almost sorry," he went on, "that we did not bring the ladies with us. Joan would have enjoyed the whole journey, while my sister is a first-rate traveller."

"Just as well that they are safely ensconced at Jerusalem," replied Carew. "They would necessarily have to be left alone while we go to the mosque, and—well, you must remember that we are beyond civilization."

"Yes, I suppose we are; but I do not anticipate any difficulty, and there hasn't been a sign of danger."

Carew did not express the thoughts which arose in his mind. Sir Richard seemed happy and confident; besides, all his doubts might be groundless.

Presently the canvas which formed the door of the tent moved, and he heard Vacchelli's voice craving permission to enter.

A moment later the Jew appeared, accompanied by a tall gaunt Arab.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MOSQUE OF EED AL KURBAN

BOTH Sir Richard and Carew looked at the stranger keenly. He was clothed in a robe of green silk, which at one time must have been very handsome, but was now much soiled and weather-stained. On his head he wore a green turban, showing that he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. His manner was somewhat obsequious, and Carew could not help noticing that he looked furtively at each of them, and cast his eyes quickly around, as though he expected to see some one hidden in the folds of the tent. He wore a long black beard, and his face was much tanned by the sun. Although he was extremely thin, he was evidently a man of immense muscular strength. He appeared to be about forty-five years old.

"This is Abou Ben Kebron, Sheikh of Tel Moloch and guardian of the great mosque of *Eed Al Kurban*, which means the place of sacrifice," said the Jew as the man bowed first to one and then to the other.

"I am greatly indebted to you for coming," said Sir Richard in very halting Arabic. "It is more than an hour's journey to Tel Moloch, I am told."

"When I was told you had come I delayed not even while one could count ten," replied the man. "Howajja"—turning to the Jew—"hath told me of your greatness in your country, and of your abundance of gold. Therefore I came quickly."

"And you have the keys of the Mosque of Eed Al Kurban?" said Sir Richard.

"I have the keys."

"And you know where these stones are?"

"Else had your greatness never heard of them. Else had not Howajja never seen them with his own eyes."

"And you can take us to them?"

"I can take you to them, but not to-night."

"No?"

"It will need much care, and must be done in secret. These stones are much venerated, ay, even were they the

tables of stone on which the prophet Moses wrote the law they could not be more treasured. Therefore, I should have to promise my people much gold, ay, very much gold."

"But can your people read the inscriptions?"

"They cannot read the inscriptions, but they know they are sacred stones, and that they were sacred stones when they were placed in the Beit Allah, the house of God, more than ten hundred years ago."

"What does he say, Carew?" said Sir Richard. "I do not quite follow him."

Bamfield Carew translated the man's words, and added in Italian, a language which they had discovered was unknown to Vacchelli, "We expected this; it is evidently a matter of barter. Stick to your 'payment by results' principle."

"They are precious stones," went on the Arab, "they are as old as the prophet Moses."

"And can you read the inscriptions?" asked Sir Richard.

"I have read them, as I told you, Sir Richard," said the Jew. "When you see them, you who are great scholar, you who have so much studied the Semidic tongues, you will say what I have said. There is noddin in the world like them. They are worth their weight in gold, ay, in gold well refined."

The Jew was so excited that he no longer spoke in deliberate and correct English, but stammered indistinctly, and with the accent of a Whitechapel Jew.

"I shall be willing to pay, and pay handsomely for them, if they are as valuable as you say," said Sir Richard; "but I must examine them first."

"You pay noddin until you see?" said the Jew excitedly.

"I will pay the Sheikh for taking us to them," said Sir Richard, "then, when I have them in my possession, I will pay him more. Afterwards, when they have been thoroughly examined by competent scholars, and they prove to be what you say they are, I will give him a further sum."

The Jew communicated this reply to the Sheikh, and Carew noticed that a sinister look came into his eyes. Evidently he was thinking deeply, and his thoughts were not altogether pleasant.

"How much will you pay?" he asked presently.

"I will pay you twenty pounds for taking us to the spot where they are placed," said Sir Richard.

The Arab rose to go.

"By the Prophet's beard," he said, "we might be playing at a boy's game. I will go back to my people and to my bed."

"But," said Carew, "you are sure the stones are what you say they are?"

"Am I sure that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west?" replied the Arab. "Am I sure that fire is hot, and that water is wet?"

"Then all is well," replied Carew. "Sir Richard will pay you twenty pounds to be his guide—only his guide."

"That is the payment for a dragoman, and not for a father of a people," replied the Arab.

"Then," went on Carew, "Sir Richard, when he has seen the stones and they appear to be what you say, he will give you more money."

"My people would not have them touched without much money. I must give the Nazir, the Imams and the Mueddins large gifts of gold before they will let an infidel put their hands on our sacred places."

The man was so persistent in this that at length Sir Richard began to relent, and but for Carew he would there and then have placed a large sum of money in the Arab's hands. But although Sir Richard was twice as old as Carew he did not possess so much knowledge of the Arab character.

"This is what we will do," he said at length, "when we are at the door of the mosque and you have opened it we will put fifty sovereigns in your hands."

The Arab's eyes glistened; but he still made a show of maintaining his ground.

"By the Prophet's beard," he cried, "do you not trust me, a father of my people, the Sheikh ul Islam?"

"By the Prophet's beard," replied Carew, in a bantering tone, "seeing you prefer that form of oath, do you not trust Sir Richard? I believe you to be as honest as any other Arab. But things happen, you know. Then, before we take the stones back to England we will give you more."

"How much more?"

Again there was a long argument; but at length a sum was agreed upon.

"To-morrow night we can go into the mosque, then?"

"To-morrow night, at midnight. Candles you must

bring, for it will be dark." I will make all preparations, and I will lead you there. But do not go nearer the mosque of Eed Al Kurban than you are now, or my people will think evil things. To-morrow you rest after your long journey, and then, two hours before midnight, you must start to come to Tel Moloch; when you are half-hour from the Beit Allah I will meet you and take you. You will bring the money?" he added, and his eyes glistened with greed.

"The money shall be brought," was the reply.

When the Arab had left the tent and the two men sat alone again, a silence fell between them for some minutes.

"Abou Ben Kebron does not impress you favourably?" said Sir Richard.

"No; but he sets my mind at rest," replied Carew.

"How?"

"Well, in this way. It is evident to me that some ancient stones are in the mosque; I am convinced, moreover, that he believes you will want to take them away."

"Why?"

"Else he would want more than fifty pounds for taking you to them. Evidently Vacchelli has persuaded him of your greatness and your riches, and he has extravagant notions as to the profit he is going to make out of the transaction. It is a good thing that the committee of the Palestine Exploration Society refused to consider Vacchelli's story, or you would not have got off so easily."

"I am obliged to you for making such good terms," said Sir Richard. "Like you, I am convinced that there are stones of considerable antiquity in the place, and when I see them I can quickly decide whether it will be worth while to trouble further about them."

"Did you notice that Mister Abou Ben Kebron seemed very uneasy?"

"Yes, I noticed that."

"What appears to me as strange is that a Sheikh ul Islam should under any circumstances be willing to barter away such priceless treasures."

"He does not know their value. You must remember that the Arab is not troubled about Biblical criticism, thus these stones will be only stones to him. Besides, you know how greedy they all are. They would sell anything for money."

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"Yes, here, as elsewhere, most things are a matter of price," said Carew; nevertheless, he did not seem convinced.

By eleven o'clock the next night they were well on their way to the village. Presently, when they were only a short distance from the mosque, Abou Ben Kebron appeared before them, and bade the Englishmen to follow him.

"All is safe," said the Arab, "for all men are asleep. Have you brought the money?" he added fiercely.

"Yes," replied Carew, "we will keep faith with you: see that you keep faith with us."

"Am I not Sheikh ul Islam?" he answered loftily. "But make no noise."

He led the way through the silent streets of the village, until presently they stood within the shadow of the mosque. A few minutes later they stood within a kind of vestibule.

"Take off your shoes," he commanded fiercely.

"Is that necessary?" said Carew. "Will it not be enough for you to tie your holy slippers over our shoes?"

"Are you not infidels?" he said, and his voice trembled as he spoke. "By Mohammed's beard, this Mosque of Eed Al Kurban is not like the common mosques at Jerusalem and Damascus. Not even the Beit Allah at Mecca is more sacred than this. Other cities have grown corrupt in the faith, but Tel Moloch maintains the true religion. Its people are among the few who have kept themselves unspotted. Therefore take off your shoes, for the place is holy."

They did as they were bidden, while Abou Ben Kebron walked around, waving his arms and whispering fiercely.

"Allah forgive me!" Carew heard him saying again and again, as if he were afraid.

"Now, the money," he cried, when they professed themselves ready. "Fifty sovereigns, count them out in my hand. No, not yet; let us get within the holy place."

They entered, and the Arab carefully and noiselessly closed the great door behind them.

"Now, no one can see but Allah Himself," he whispered fearfully. "Light the candles, and count the sovereigns in my hand."

Sir Richard counted fifty sovereigns in the man's hands.

"And more I shall have to-morrow?" he cried.

"More you shall have to-morrow if what I have been told is true," replied Sir Richard.

"Come, then," he cried, as he led the way across the great building.

A kind of fear laid hold of Carew as he followed him. To the young man's excited imagination the rows of huge columns seemed like sentinels forbidding him to continue in his designs; the spirits of unnumbered hosts of those who had been faithful to the Koran seemed to threaten him with unutterable things. Still he kept on with the others and presently they found themselves in a kind of anteroom, and a few minutes later Sir Richard Winscombe was on his knees, carefully examining some strange-looking hieroglyphics.

"Is it not as I say, Sir Richard?" whispered the Jew presently.

The Baronet was pale to the lips, and his hands trembled with excitement.

"You say," he said to the Arab, "that I can take these stones away if I pay you the money we agreed upon?"

"I have been mistaken," said Abou. "I must have more—much more. The Nazir, the Imams and the Mueddins say they must have more."

"How much more?" asked the Baronet.

"I would suggest," said Carew, "that we have an interview with the Nazir, so that—"

"No, no," cried the Arab. "Am I not the Sheikh ul Islam? Is not the Nazir my inferior?"

"Nevertheless, if you will not stand by the bargain we made last night, we must consult this Nazir," said Carew.

"Then you will never enter here again," cried the Arab. "I tell you that—but let it be, if you will give me what you said, you may take them."

"When?" asked Sir Richard.

"Now," cried the Arab.

"But I have no more money here."

"Ah, but you will give me your word—you are English, you will give me your word. And to-morrow may be too late."

"I am sure they are genuine," said Sir Richard to Carew. "The characters are somewhat obliterated, but I have read enough to know the tremendous importance of this discovery."

He was so excited by what he had seen that he had failed to notice that the Arab had completely changed his attitude.

Abou Ben Kebron had declared that it would be impossible for Sir Richard to touch the stones until the hearts of the Nazir and the Imams had been warmed by the sight of much gold and the promise of more. Now he seemed anxious that the stones should be removed at once. At that moment, however, neither the Baronet nor Carew troubled about this. What they believed to be a discovery of supreme importance had filled them with a kind of fever. Why wait until a later date when the precious stones lay before them?

"Strike while the iron is hot," said the young man; "delay will only bring fresh difficulties."

Sir Richard, nothing loath, set to work to remove the stones. His heart beat so wildly with excitement, and his mind was so filled with the greatness of his good fortune, that he did not notice a noise in the main building, and was only aroused by the Arab speaking in a hoarse, fearful whisper.

"Fly, fly, Howajja," he said. "Leave everything—come!"

But before Sir Richard realized what he meant, a number of men rushed upon him, with a fierce look in their eyes. As for the Arab and the Jew, they were nowhere to be seen.

For a moment Carew thought the men would have struck them dead, so fierce was their anger. Indeed, it was only through the command of one old man, who wore a white robe and a large green turban, that the evident purpose of the wild-eyed Arabs was not carried into effect.

For a few minutes there was such a clamour that neither of the two Englishmen could understand a word that was said. That they had been caught in the act of committing a terrible sacrilege was manifest. The men's faces were distorted with rage, and as they pointed first to the stones, and then to the two Englishmen, they flourished their knives and uttered the most terrible curses.

"Death, death!" were the words Carew distinguished amidst the babel of tongues, while again he heard them saying, "Infidels," handwriting of God," "blasphemy," "pit of flame."

Two of the Arabs, wearing the most ferocious aspect, had seized Sir Richard, and while one glared at him and uttered wild denunciations, the other shook him fiercely, pointing with his knife at the stones he had come to seek.

Again and again Sir Richard tried to speak, but in his

excitement his scanty stock of Arabic left him. Even had he spoken the language fluently, it would not have availed him at that moment. Their captors were too mad with rage, to listen to a word. As for Carew, he was in an almost worse predicament. They flourished their knives above his head, some struck him with their open hands, while others poured curses upon him.

The young man bore this treatment quietly and grimly. He knew enough of the men who had surrounded him to remain perfectly quiet until their passion had somewhat spent itself. Besides, he saw that the white-bearded old man was advising moderation, and that little by little they were yielding to his influence.

"Tell me the meaning of this accursed outrage?" Carew heard the old man say presently.

"Yes, yes, tell us that before we send you to the flaming pit," yelled two or three others.

"That's what I have been trying to do ever since you came here," said Carew quietly.

"Then tell us—tell us!"

"Be quiet, and I will," he replied; "but it is impossible to make myself heard amidst this clamour. You needn't shake me, man; I can tell you without that."

"Let the stranger speak," said the old man; let him explain if he can this outrage on the stones of Allah. Let him tell us why he and the grey-bearded Howajja have come as thieves in the night to steal away the handwriting of Allah, and thus bring a curse upon His faithful ones."

Carew told his story calmly. They had not come to steal, he said, but to buy. Their Sheikh ul Islam had opened the mosque for them, and showed them the stones bearing the ancient writing, and had sold them for a sum of money.

"Sheikh ul Islam!" cried the old man. "Who is this Sheikh ul Islam? Where is he? Let him appear."

"He was wiser than we," replied Carew; "he and the Jew Vacchelli got away through that doorway just as you came in."

"What name bore he?" asked the old man.

"Abou Ben Kebron," replied Carew.

A great shout of derision, anger and scorn arose, but Carew saw that they believed his story. For a few minutes only confusion prevailed. Each man seemed to vie with the other

in excited speech. At length the counsels of the old man evidently prevailed.

"Come," he said to Sir Richard and Carew presently.

They were led through the mosque until they reached the door by which they entered, and here Sir Richard was somewhat comforted by the fact they were allowed to put on their shoes.

"Cheer up, Sir Richard," Carew managed to say. "I am inclined to think the worst is over. Evidently our friend Abou Ben Kebron is a well-known character among these fellows, and they will now look upon us as being deceived by him."

"Yes, but the stones—the writing!" replied the Baronet. "I am afraid we have lost them for ever."

"Who knows?" said Carew.

By this time they were outside the mosque, and their captors led them through the village towards the mountain range from which they had come. Carew saw, however, that they were travelling towards the south rather than towards the West. A little later they reached a squalid village among the hills, and were without ceremony ushered into a dirty hovel and left alone in the darkness.

"Well, Carew," asked Sir Richard, "what do you think of this?"

"I am glad the ladies did not come," replied the young man. "But don't be down-hearted; we shall get out of it all right. There'll be a lot of patter among these fellows, and then—well, it'll be a matter of money."

"You think so?"

"I feel sure of it."

When morning came food was brought to them, and after they had eaten, the old man and two others asked them many questions, and Carew in answering them repeated the story he had told them the previous night. Throughout the day they were allowed to walk around a kind of courtyard at the back of their prison, but they were kept under strict supervision.

That evening they were taken to a hollow among the hills, and there the old man whose influence had been so potent the night before made known his will.

"Abou Ben Kebron is a thief, a liar, a blasphemer," he said. "He was Sheikh ul Islam, but he has been disgraced.

He has escaped with the Jew ; but they will be found, brought back, tortured and put to death. We believe your story, but you have committed a great sin, a sin so great that unless it be expiated, the wrath of Allah will be upon us all for ever and ever."

At the word expiation Carew's eyes twinkled. "It's only a matter of money after all," he thought.

"Well, tell us your will," he said.

"This is our judgment," said the old man. "Each of you pay us two hundred pieces of your gold ; that is to atone for the outrage done to us. For the outrage done to Allah you do more. To atone for that, and to keep Allah's curse from resting upon us for ever, you here and now embrace the true faith, the one and only true faith which was revealed to Mohammed, the Prophet of Allah."

## CHAPTER III

### THE ALTERNATIVE

1

"WHAT does he say?" asked Sir Richard; "I did not quite follow him. The two hundred pieces of gold I understood, and, of course, I pay willingly; but the rest I could not understand."

"I think it was a joke," said Carew. "He says we must become Mohammedans."

"Be careful, Carew," said Sir Richard; "say nothing to anger him, but make him realize how impossible this is."

"Your honour is pleased to jest with us," said Carew with a laugh to the old man; but he was sorry the moment the words had escaped his lips. The look of fanaticism became wilder, and the Arab ground his teeth with rage.

"Jest," he said; "doth a man jest with Allah? Do you add insult to sacrilege? By the Prophet's beard, speak not in that fashion."

"As you are the Sheik ul Islam," said Carew, "I meant no insult. I did not imagine that you meant all you said."

"Sheikh ul Islam!" cried the old man. "I am not the Sheikh ul Islam. Were he here, he would not treat you as I have treated you. Were Abou Bazouki, the Sheikh ul Islam, here, he would have torn your flesh from your bones when he saw you committing an outrage on the stones whereon Allah Himself hath written. Ay, and surely he will be revenged on Abou Ben Kebron for daring to tell you that he was chosen as the leader of our people. For great as your sin hath been, my son, it is small compared with his. You have sinned in ignorance; he hath sinned in knowledge. He hath been born in the true faith, but he hath defiled his garments with lies and evil deeds, therefore will vengeance speedily come upon him. He—he, had he been faithful, might have still been Sheikh ul Islam, for evil as he is, he hath much wisdom. Therefore was he able to lead you to the place where the handwriting of Allah is. You did not know this, but your sin still remains. You, an infidel, have tried to remove the stones, whereon the handwriting of Allah is, from their resting-place, and but for the will of Allah you would have

succeeded in your designs. It seems as an accident that Racheed saw Abou Ben Kebron leading you into the Beit Allah, but it was Allah who caused him to see, and enabled us to take you captive. But concerning our judgment I change not. For the outrage you have offered to us, the faithful of Allah, you shall pay gold; but for the outrage offered to Allah himself, that cannot be paid with gold. He is angry, and must be appeased, and as the Prophet himself taught, the truest way to appease His anger is to convert an infidel from his sin and to turn his heart to the truth."

"And if we will not embrace your faith?" said Carew.

"You will never see the light of another day," said the old man.

There was an exclamation of satisfaction as he spoke. The eyes of the men who stood around burned red with fierce joy at his words.

Sir Richard had been rightly informed when he was told that the most fanatical Moslem who cried "death or conversion," in the days when Mohammed was establishing his religion, was not more fanatical than this sect, with whom they had been brought into contact.

"And if we accept your conditions?" said Carew.

"You shall be forgiven."

"But what will be the good of our embracing your faith?" said Carew. "I could immediately disavow it when I got back to civiliz—that is, back to my own country again."

"That is not my business," said the old man. "If you proved unfaithful after you had avowed the true faith you would sink deeper into the pit of flame, but my hands would be clean from your crime, and the curse of your deed could not return."

"But we need instruction in your faith before we can accept it," said Carew.

The old man shook his shoulders scornfully. "Try not my patience too far. Why should I instruct? There is but one true religion, even that of the faithful. Why should I listen to your foolish questions? There will be plenty of time for you to instruct yourself out of the Koran when you have embraced its truths. While you are asking foolish questions and I am answering them the curse of Allah will fall. No, no. Accept now, or you shall never see the light of another day."

Carew saw that he meant it, and he knew from the way that

the others gripped their knives that what the old man said would be done.

"I must consult with my friend," said Carew. "I must tell him all you have said."

"It is well," replied the old man; "but waste not precious time. In an hour the sunset prayers will be offered. If within an hour from that you are not of those upon whom Allah can smile, you die."

"You heard what he said?" remarked Carew to Sir Richard.

"I caught the drift of it," said the Baronet. "What will my poor little Joan do without me?"

"Oh, but it must not come to that," replied Carew. "I tell you, I don't mean to give up my life so easily."

"But surely you do not mean to turn Mohammedan?"

"Why not? All religions are alike to me."

"But you couldn't, man—you couldn't."

"You mean to say that you will throw away your life?"

"Yes, before I would denounce my faith."

Sir Richard had been regarded as a broad-minded Christian, who had great toleration for all forms of religion. No one looked on him as one whose Christianity was militant, or whose faith was very aggressive, but the look of quiet determination in his eyes suggested deeper conviction than might have been expected. Besides, there has ever been something in the heart of an Englishman which causes him to hold fast to the faith of his fathers.

Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"You refuse then?" he said.

"Absolutely. I will pay twice—yes, five times the amount which he asks; but as to the other, of course it is impossible."

"I did not know you were such a devotee to the Christian faith, Sir Richard. Why, every educated man knows that all religions are pretty much the same when you get to the root of things. The mind of man naturally demands a primary cause for all existing phenomena, and there is a general belief that what we call right is better than wrong. As for the distinctive features of the various religions, why, no one except the ignorant and the prejudiced pay any serious heed to them."

"Possibly I may be both," said Sir Richard, "but I would

rather die than renounce Christianity and accept Islamism. Of course, you will do what you think best. My decision is unalterable."

"But I have heard you say you can worship elsewhere than in a Christian church, and that to you a Buddhist temple and a Mohammedan mosque are also houses of God."

"Certainly," replied the Baronet; and from his compressed lips and quiet look of determination, it was evident to Carew that this scholarly English gentleman, who made no great profession of ardent Christianity, was ready to die for his faith.

"Well, what is your decision?" asked the old Arab.

"My friend is ready to double the amount of money," replied Carew.

"But will he accept our faith?" Gold can only atone for the affront offered to the faithful; it cannot atone for the insult offered to God."

"But don't you see how foolish you are? If you kill us, you will get no gold at all," said Carew. "We do not carry it with us, and if you keep us alive until our ransom is paid—"

"Am I a thief, a robber?" cried the old Arab passionately. "Had we been robbers we would have set a great ransom, but you have sinned against Allah, whose curse will rest for ever upon us unless it be removed by your death, or by giving up all false faith and accepting the one true faith revealed to His Prophet, by His angels, by visions and dreams, and earthquakes and fires."

"But my friend will not give up his faith."

"Then he must go speedily to the pit of flame," replied the old man.

"You mean you will kill him?"

"Within an hour from sunset."

"And what then?" asked Carew.

"What then?"

"Yes, what then? For, let me tell you, Sir Richard is a great man in his own land. When the news reaches England that you have killed him because he was led by false representation to commit an error, do you think the English Government will do nothing? I tell you your sick man, the Sultan, will become sicker than ever. He will have to deal with a people who mean business; and if your Sultan does not wipe you all off the face of the earth the English

Government will wipe your Sultan off the face of the earth."

The old man laughed scornfully. "I have heard men talk before," he said quietly. "But supposing what you say is true, what then? Suppose the news of your fate were to reach your land, which may not come to pass,"—and he smiled grimly,—“and suppose your King caused his serene and sacred Greatness to be angry with us”—and his smile became a laugh—“whose anger shall we fear most: the anger of man or the anger of God? Let man do his worst, still the will of Allah must be done."

Again Carew became grave. There was no more suggestion of relenting in the face of the old man, or on the faces of those around them, than in the hard rocks which formed the hills around them. To them the two Englishmen had committed sacrilege against God, and only by their death or their conversion could the curse of an angry God be turned aside. The young man looked again towards Sir Richard, whose face showed a determination equal to that of the Arabs.

In a sense he admired Sir Richard's bulldog tenacity; nevertheless, it was foolishness. For him, Bamfield Carew, to die for a matter of religious opinion was just as foolish, just as Quixotic, as the things for which Don Quixote and Sancho Panzo contended.

The sun began to set behind the western hills, the whole district was lit up with indescribable glory, and as it cast its red rays across mountain and valley, the Arabs began to pray. While some kept guard, the others cast themselves upon the earth, and began to pour forth their cries to God. The light of faith was in their eyes, the joy of the conviction that God heard them rested upon their faces.

"God is the only God; Mohammed is His prophet!"

Sir Richard looked at them with a stern, set expression on his face. He reflected that the men who prayed would ruthlessly murder him because they believed that by so doing they would turn aside the curse of the God to whom they prayed. But this was not the thought which passed through Bamfield Carew's mind. The sight of the praying Arabs rather impressed him. He had seen them at prayer many times, and had thought but little of it. But now he looked at things differently. The alternative which had been placed before him became more and more real, and while he was by

no means a coward he did not want to die. In a sense he dreaded it. There was nothing beyond, and he hated the idea of nothingness. Even if there was anything, were not the Mohammedans as likely to be right as the Christians? Why, then, should he die? He had nothing to renounce, and if he accepted the Mohammedan faith, well, he should accept a kind of fatalistic philosophy towards which he had a great leaning. The young Arab who had first given him the idea of studying Arabic was a Mohammedan, and his religion was only a fatalistic philosophy. He remembered being greatly interested at the time in the young fellow's intellectual position. Certainly he was not fool enough to die for Christianity, which, as far as he was concerned, was a discarded religion.

Another thought struck him. Could he not, by pretending to become Mohammedan, gain such influence with the Arabs as to be able to save Sir Richard's life? It seemed quite possible. Of course, he did not like such a method of procedure, but the circumstances were not ordinary.

"I should like to say, first of all, that there is much in your religion which appeals to me," he said.

"Ah, that is well," cried the old man; "your complete conversion will be easy. Renounce the wrong, accept the true, that is all. May Allah be praised."

"But if I say that I accept your faith," said Carew, "that is, you make conditions for me; I also would make conditions with you. Sir Richard, my friend, is an older man than I, and therefore cannot be moved so easily, therefore let me state my terms."

"There can be no terms save those I have told you of. Accept the faith and turn aside the anger of Allah and you live; refuse and you die—that is all."

"Not quite," replied Carew quietly. "As I said, Sir Richard is an older man than I, and cannot give up his prejudices so easily, therefore you do not act fairly. I am willing to formally renounce Christianity and accept Mohammedanism—with tons of mental reservation," he added to himself—"on two conditions. The first is this: that I am allowed to take 'rubblings' of the sacred stones in the *Beit Allah*, and that I am allowed to photograph them."

"That shall be granted," said the old man. "To the faithful the good things of Allah are given."

"And the next is this," went on Carew; "Sir Richard shall be allowed a week to consider the alternatives you have placed before him, during which time your most capable instructor shall teach him the mysteries of your faith. Surely my conversion will avert the anger of Allah"—there was a sneer in his voice as he said this—"and you will thus be perhaps able to gain two converts instead of one."

At first the Arabs grew angry with the suggestion, but presently Carew softened their objections. He urged that Sir Richard believed his Christianity just as they believed in Moslemism, therefore, to suddenly demand his conversion was not reasonable. The curse of Allah could not rest upon them, seeing they had gained one convert, while, according to the Koran, the faithful should, under certain circumstances, have patience with those who were in the dark. Even Mohammed, their prophet, he urged, spent many days in persuading the doubtful, and many years elapsed after his visions before he was able to gain converts outside his own family.

"It is well," said the old man at length. "If you accept the faith now we will allow your friend one week to reflect, and we will provide instructors for him."

"Carew, I will be no party to this," said Sir Richard, "and I wish you to tell them that I shall never be a Mohammedan—never!" And the Baronet stamped his foot in his excitement.

"I am not going to throw away my life for a fad," said Carew; "and if you refuse to accept a week of grace, during which time a hundred things may happen, then you are either a fool or a madman."

"I desire to live as much as you do," said Sir Richard; "but I will not live by pretending what can never be true. Look here," he cried, stammering some Arabic words which none of them could understand, but by which he tried to tell them that he was a Christian, and that nothing could ever induce him to become a Mohammedan.

"If there is any responsibility, I am taking it," said Carew. "I simply refuse to throw away my life, and I have done my best to save yours. You lose nothing by gaining time, and if you are anxious to die I have no doubt our friends will oblige you at the end of the week."

"Now, then," said the old Arab, who did not understand

a word that either of them had said, "we will make your conversion complete. Here you are a convert to the true faith. You give up lies and you hold to the truth. In an hour you shall be received by the faithful as one of the faithful. And to prove that your conversion is true you shall make profession before the people."

He gave a loud cry after he had spoken these words, and a few seconds later a number of ragged, unkempt Arabs, men, women and children, came to them.

"Look, my children," said the old man. "Allah is good, and the true faith is spreading. Behold a convert, and I have called you here that you may see him renounce his idolatry and accept the creed of the faithful."

The sun had by this time dipped behind the western mountains, but the brief twilight had not yet departed. Moreover, the moon was high in the clear heavens, so that every action could be plainly seen by all.

"See," continued the Arab. "Here I hold in my hand two sticks. They are well nigh rotten, but they will suffice. You see that one is much longer than the other, so they meet my need. Now see again. I place them on the ground, so. There is a cross, the false emblem of a false faith. Now see; here is the Koran, the book of the faithful, revealed unto our holy Prophet by angels and lightnings, by writings in the heavens, by voices in the earthquakes, by dreams and visions. Behold, this is what the convert will do. He will trample the cross in the earth in sign that he has renounced the false. Then he will kiss this sacred book in sign that he has embraced the one true religion."

He held up the Koran as he spoke, and there was a yell of savage joy among the motley crew who stood around.

"Now then, my dear," continued the old Arab, turning to Carew, "make a good profession of your faith. Trample on the cross and kiss the Koran."

Sceptic as he was, Bamfield almost shivered at the words of the Arab. He did not realize at the time he had made his promise that this form of profession would be required. Now, however, he called to mind that this was a recognised form of renunciation, which every Christian must make on becoming a Moslem. In spite of everything there was something ghastly about it. The Christ idea was only a myth, but it had become sacred to millions of people, while the

cross was the Christian's emblem of salvation. In his boyhood he had genuflected before it times unnumbered.. It is true he had been led to laugh at it in later years, nevertheless the influence of generations of faith could not be easily destroyed.

"You shall not do this," said Sir Richard. "Talk about sacrilege, this is sacrilege of the very worst nature. The very idea is devilish."

For a moment he hesitated, then his eyes hardened, and he set his teeth together.

"It means nothing to me, Sir Richard," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders, "and as I told you, I am not going to throw away my life for a fad. Besides, if there is any value in those old stones—well, you heard what the old man said. Moreover, you'll have a week to turn round in, and meanwhile I'll devise means to get you back to Jerusalem safe and sound."

"I refuse to benefit by this deed," said Sir Richard; "the curse of God will rest upon it."

"Curse of God!" cried the young man. "You are as superstitious as they."

"I command you not to do it," cried Sir Richard, almost beside himself at thought of what Carew had promised to do.

"Command, eh!" said Carew, almost angrily, for the situation had begun to tell upon his nerves. He looked around on the shock-headed, ragged crew, noting the wild gleam of fanaticism in their eyes and the look of eager expectancy on their faces.

"Come, come, my son," said the Arab.

Carew stepped into the circle.

"Here goes," he said with a laugh, as he placed his heel where the two sticks crossed each other.

With a loud crack, almost like a pistol-shot, they cracked beneath his weight, and were crushed into the earth beneath his feet, while the Arabs gave a yell of savage joy.

"*God is the only God, Mohammed is His prophet!*"

The cry rang out in the still evening air, and again, in spite of himself, Bamfield Carew shuddered, while the shadow of a great fear rested upon him.

"Now, my son," said the old man, "you must repeat these words after me: 'By this act I renounce the false faith of the cross.'"

He repeated the words like one in a dream, but it seemed to him as though something gripped his throat as he spoke.

"That is well. Now that you have trampled on the cross and thus renounced a false religion, you must kiss the Koran, in sign that you have accepted the true."

He took the Koran in his hands, and having kissed it, he repeated the words which the Arab spoke before him.

"I refuse, absolutely refuse, to save my life by this," said Sir Richard. "It is blasphemy. If I had a son I would a thousand times rather see him die than see him do what you have done."

## CHAPTER IV

### MOHAMMEDAN AND CHRISTIAN

SIR RICHARD'S voice was drowned in the shout of exultation which the Arabs gave, and yet Bamfield Carew knew by the look on his face the meaning of the words he had uttered.

"He will think better of this to-morrow," he reflected. "I must not be hard on him. He is still held fast by the chains of superstition, and therefore thinks I have committed the unpardonable sin."

The thought had scarcely passed through his mind when the old Arab caught him in his arms and kissed him. "Ah, my son, you are a happy man," he cried, "for you will now enter the bliss of the faithful. Here on earth you will have the smile of Allah, while the joys of Paradise will be yours in the life to come."

Bamfield Carew made a grimace. "I think the old man's embrace is the worst part of the ceremony," he said to himself. "I hope the rest of the faithful will not think it their duty to follow his example."

"Now you shall be treated as one of us," went on the old man. "Speak my son, is there anything you desire? If there is, it shall be obtained for you. To-morrow we will devise means whereby the ransom of two hundred pieces of gold shall be paid."

"You hear that?" said Carew, turning to Sir Richard. "The finding of the ransom will be a means of setting you free."

"I refuse to benefit by your accursed deed," cried the Baronet.

"I imagine you will have to benefit by it whether you will or not," retorted Carew. "At any rate, it has added a week to your life. Come, Sir Richard, there is no use in adopting such an attitude. As I have told you before, all religions are alike to me, and you will be glad for what I have done some time."

"Never," replied Sir Richard. "It was a ghastly deed. You have trampled on the cross of Christ, the emblem of our salvation, in order to save your paltry life."

"A couple of dried sticks!" retorted the young man. "I trampled on them; yes, and I would do it again. I am a young man, and I have life all before me, why should I throw it away for a fad?"

"I wish I could speak their language better," cried Sir Richard; "I would tell them why you have done this, I would make them know that you were mocking them."

"They would not believe you," said Carew. "They believe me to be one of the faithful."

"Come," cried the old Arab to Carew, "to-night you shall sleep beneath my roof, and before you go to sleep I will instruct you in some of the truths of our religion."

"Pardon me," said Carew, "but I would rather spend the night with my friend, even as I spent it with him last night."

Sir Richard's knowledge of Arabic was but scanty, but he caught the drift of Carew's words.

"No," he cried, "I would rather be alone. I will not spend a night beneath the same roof with you. Go where you will, I do not wish to have any further communication with you."

Carew looked at him in astonishment. Evidently Sir Richard meant what he said. He had never looked upon the Baronet as a very religious man. He knew that when in England he went to church, and that he supported the ordinary Christian organizations, but he had regarded him as one who formally accepted the Christian dogmas because of education and association. He knew, too, that he had a scholar's interest in all that appertained to Biblical Criticism, but that he attached any vital importance to the peculiar dogmas of Christianity he never seriously believed. After all, he, Carew, had only trampled on a couple of sticks in order to save his life. The mystical meaning associated with the sticks was so much nonsense. And yet Sir Richard, an educated English gentleman, regarded his act as sacrilege.

"I repeat it," said Sir Richard. "Go where you like, do what you like. I would rather be alone. I can at least pray that God will forgive you for what you have done to-night."

"As you will," said Carew quietly.

He walked away with the Arab, revolving plans in his mind whereby he might make the Baronet's condition more bearable and presently get away from these fanatics.

"At least it will be interesting to spend a few days with

these people," he reflected. "My word, I am getting fine material for a book. Nothing remains now but for me to marry some Arab maiden of high degree," and he laughed almost merrily.

The next day Carew tried to have another conversation with Sir Richard, but he was not very successful. It is true the young man found him polite and courteous as of old, but he realized there was a gulf between them. Even on the question of the stones in the mosque the Baronet would not enter into conversation. Not that his interest in antiquarian research had abated, but neither had his abhorrence at the act which Carew had committed lessened one jot.

"And yet he knew that I was no Christian," reflected Carew. "Knowing that I had years ago discarded the Christian story, he accepted me as his companion on this expedition, and yet, because I have trodden on two sticks placed in the form of a cross, he adopts this attitude."

"I think I have gained some little influence with these people," he remarked before leaving him; "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"You are sure, Sir Richard? Of course, this is a miserable hole, but I can at least make your condition bearable."

"I desire nothing, thank you."

"I am going to see your dragoman. I am in hopes that he will have sent messengers to Jerusalem. In less than a week help should arrive."

Sir Richard was silent.

"Have you any suggestions to the dragoman?"

"None at all, thank you."

"You are of my opinion, aren't you? You feel sure that some help will come before the end of a week?"

Sir Richard shook his head.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to throw away your life without a struggle!"

"I am quite prepared for whatever may happen."

"Very well, Sir Richard," said Carew; "I have done my best, and in spite of what you say, I shall continue to do it."

"Look, Mr. Carew," said Sir Richard at length. "I did not mean to say anything when you came, but I will say this. I am an old-fashioned man. I do not claim to be any better than other men, and I have been regarded as somewhat

cosmopolitan in my views concerning religion. That was why your professed agnosticism did not hinder me from accepting you as a companion on this expedition. Belief is not a thing to be forced, and there are many good and reverent men who are agnostics. Moreover, no one has a right to interfere with another's acceptance of or non-acceptance of certain religious dogmas. But that which happened last night belongs to another category. The cross, whatever else it may mean, stands for all that is highest and holiest in life. Whatever you may think of Christ, you cannot deny that the cross on which He died stands as an emblem of salvation to millions. It stands for that to me. The cross stands also for an expression of the love of a Divine Man, ay, as an expression of the love of God. Thus, when you trampled on that cross it seemed to me as though you trampled on Christ Himself. The deed was a ghastly one. When I heard those sticks crack it seemed to me as though you were crushing the body of Christ. In a way I cannot understand, I seemed to see Christ's face drawn with agony. I know it was pure imagination, and yet I felt my own heart torn with pain, and I cried out in anguish. I felt it to be an unholy act, and that nothing but a curse could follow it. You may call this superstition if you like, perhaps it is, although, as you know, I am of Puritan extraction, and have no sympathy with the peculiar tenets in which you were reared. All the same, your deed haunts me. I find myself shuddering at it with abhorrence, and try as I will to think otherwise, I have lost respect for you. I cannot associate with you any more. For why did you do this? You did it to save your life. You trampled on the cross of Christ for that. You crushed the cross in the earth, and renounced Christianity at the command of an ignorant Arab, and then to crown all, you kissed the Koran. As though your life, or my life, or any man's life is worth buying at such a price. To you this is foolishness. Very well, it may be, but I refuse to participate in any advantage you think may accrue from it. God knows I want to live. Life is sweet to me, and if I am killed, I dare not think of what my little girl would suffer. But I feel that I should be unworthy the name of an Englishman, much less a Christian, if I accepted life or favour as a consequence of your deed, and dearly as my Joan loves me, I am sure she would rather know I was dead, than feel that my life was

purchased by a deed like that. Good-day."

"Well, I didn't think superstition had such power," said Carew to himself as he walked away. "If he were some Roman Catholic devotee, I could understand it, but a man of the world, and an educated man to boot—well, it seems impossible."

As he left the miserable place where Sir Richard was, he noticed that the Arabs regarded him with a kind of wonder. Some held out their hands for backsheesh, while others whispered to their companions about his conversion. In spite of the fact that the old Arab had promised him all the advantages of the faithful, he realized that he was followed wherever he went, and presently when he stated his intention of going to the tents in order to obtain some necessary articles, the old Arab, who was acting as the sheikh of the village, shook his head.

"Am I to understand that I am a prisoner then?" he asked.

"Is not Howajja under the open sky?" said the old man. "Has he any fetters on his wrists or his ankles? Did he not accompany the faithful to prayer at sunrise this morning? How, then, can he be a prisoner?"

"Then why can I not go and obtain necessary wearing apparel?" he asked.

"Howajja can go, but not alone."

"And why not?"

The old Arab smiled and shook his head, but he did not speak.

"Are the dragomen and our servants prisoners too?" asked Carew.

"Not prisoners, but guarded night and day."

"Why guarded?"

"Howajja is not a fool," replied the old man. "If they were not guarded, might they not send messengers to Jerusalem? And then—oh, but what need is there for words?"

"Then what are your plans concerning us?"

"One week, Howajja, and then if the rich Englishman, as a sign that he has accepted the one true faith, tramples on the cross and kisses the Koran, both he and you, Howajja, shall swear by all the oaths that I shall tell you of, that you will tell no man what hath happened to you, and that you

will send us the gold we agreed upon, then you shall go free ; but until then——” The Arab ceased speaking and smiled serenely.

“Then come with me, or send some one with me, that I may go and get what I want.”

At that moment they heard a cry from the village of Tel Moloch, and looking they saw a man standing on the top of a minaret of the mosque.

*“God is the only God. Mohammed is His Prophet. Come to prayer ! Come to prayer !”*

“It is the call to midday prayer,” said the old Arab. “Come.”

Carew walked along by his side, evidently but little pleased.

“I must keep up this farce for a few days,” he said to himself. “Upon my word, if I had thought of all this last night I would——”

“See how the faithful flock to the Beit Allah,” said the old man with a smile. “Not even in Mecca itself are the followers of the Prophet so faithful as in Tel Moloch. Nowhere are his commands so faithfully obeyed. Many, many, ay, even in Mecca, will go to the pit of flame, for they have slackened their hold on the true faith, but here all are faithful, ay, and all shall be saved. Look, the Nazir has called to prayer, the bowwabs have opened the doors, and the faithful enter therein.”

Carew entered the mosque with the rest. “I am losing my self-respect,” he said as he pulled off his shoes. “I am not sure that Sir Richard is not happier than I. Still, what matters ? Am I not a fatalist ? Kismet. Allah wills it. It is fate—destiny.”

He knelt with the others, but even as he knelt he saw himself trampling on the cross, he heard the noise of crackling wood, he remembered the words he had said. All around him the Arabs prayed. Some uttered wild incoherent cries, while others seemed to be gazing into space in silent ecstasy. The whole building was charged with religious fervour. There could be no doubt that these men believed in their religion.

When the time of prayer was over he went out with the rest, the old Sheikh walking by his side.

“I will go with you my son, so that you may obtain the things you desire,” he said.

Carew walked away quietly. Neither was in the humour for talking, and not another word was spoken until they reached the tents which the young man had left in company with Sir Richard Winscombe two days before. All the tents remained just as they had left them. The horses and mules nibbled at the parched grass of the wilderness, while the servants stood around chatting and smoking. Evidently no harm had happened to them, although Carew noticed that the camp was surrounded by a number of Arabs, who stood close to the tents with loaded muskets in their hands. Thus, while no violence had been offered to the servants which had been brought from Jerusalem, it was plainly to be seen that if any attempted to escape they would be shot down immediately.

"Your goods are well guarded, eh?" said the old Arab serenely as he looked at Carew.

"Not only our goods, but our servants," remarked Carew.

"Howajja does not wonder at that," was the reply.

"Have I not already explained?"

Carew shrugged his shoulders, but did not reply. He saw that in spite of his profession he was not trusted. Moreover, every attempt he made to enter into conversation with his servants was frustrated. The old Arab followed him everywhere, and made all confidence impossible. Still, Carew was carefully observant of every one, and one thing struck him forcibly. The chief dragoman, in whom Sir Richard had placed a great deal of trust, was evidently as desirous of obtaining speech with him as he was of speaking to the dragoman. The man followed him everywhere, and although the guard made it impossible for them to exchange confidences, Carew felt sure that he wished to tell him something.

Presently, after having taken the things he desired from his tent, and seeing the dragoman close to him, Carew spoke aloud to him.

"You have kept good guard, Abdul," he said.

"*Tihib*," said the man.

"And all the servants are well?"

"*Tihib*," replied the man again, and Carew thought he detected a peculiar intonation in his voice.

"I hope we shall start our return journey in a few days."

"*Kalcere Tihib*."

There could be no doubt about it, the man meant something, and that something was of a cheerful nature. The conversation had been carried on in Arabic, so that the old Sheikh should not suspect anything; but Carew knew by the emphasis which the man placed upon the words "*Kateere Tihib*" (very good), and by the peculiar expression of his eyes, that, had they been alone, he would have told him good news. What it was he could not conjecture, but evidently, although a strong guard was set over him, the man was in high good humour.

"Sir Richard has sent for his things?"

"Yes, Howajja. *Tihib*."

"And did you send them by one of our own men?"

"No, Howajja. *Tihib*."

Carew cast his eyes around the camp again. He looked at the servants one by one. They were seated around, smoking and chatting.

"All our men here?"

"All!" The man winked at him meaningly, and then smiled. "We have food enough," he added, "and we sleep well. *Tihib*."

"Come, my dear," said the old Arab, "it is time for us to return."

Carew returned to the village in deep thought.

That word *Tihib* so often repeated meant something, but what? What could it mean but good news? Yet how could there be good news when they were all guarded night and day?

"Your servants keep good guard," remarked Carew to the old Sheikh presently.

"Good guard, my son."

"And our servants have been guarded ever since you discovered us in the *Beit Allah*?"

"Within three hours of the time we found you, and before one of them dreamt that aught had happened to you, they were there. Ah, my son, it is well for you that you have appeased the wrath of Allah."

Carew said nothing, but many thoughts passed through his mind as they returned to the Sheikh's house.

For the next three days nothing of note happened, except that Carew again visited the room behind the *Mehrab* in the mosque, where he was able to obtain rubbings of the

"Stones of Moab." He also obtained leave to photograph them, although there was some difficulty in doing this. The Nazir who accompanied him protested wildly, but at length was persuaded as to the harmlessness of photography. Carew also received much instruction from the Nazir, and so attentive was he to that gentleman's exhortation, and so many questions did he ask, that he became quite renowned in Tel Moloch for his piety.

He also tried to obtain further audience with Sir Richard, but the Baronet requested that he might be left alone. He held to his resolution to hold no converse with Carew, even although he knew that the young man had succeeded in making his imprisonment far more bearable than it had been during the first two days.

Had Sir Richard been at liberty Carew would have almost enjoyed his sojourn at Tel Moloch. Although carefully guarded, he was treated with marked deference, and he had excellent opportunities of studying Arab ways and customs. The stray articles he had intended to write had now expanded themselves into a book. Indeed, he felt sure that he was obtaining material whereby he would be able to make quite a reputation in a novel on life in an Arab village. The anger of Sir Richard at his so-called conversion troubled him less and less. When once he returned to England the whole episode would become a thing to be laughed at, and all people would commend him for what he had done.

But Sir Richard was not at liberty; moreover, the more he learnt about this fanatical sect of Moslems who lived there the more he was convinced that if Sir Richard remained obdurate he would have to pay the penalty with his life. The comfort which Abdul's words gave him at first soon passed away. The taking of a life to these fanatical Moslems was of far less importance than that the anger of God caused by Sir Richard's deed of sacrilege should be left unappeased.

"Does my friend show any signs of relenting?" he asked of the Nazir, who was installed as the Baronet's chief religious instructor.

"He shall die," said the man savagely. It was the day before the end of the week that Carew stipulated for. "He shall die, I tell you. Yesterday I thought his eyes were opened, but to-day when I made a cross for him to trample on, and when I offered him the Holy Koran to kiss, he

mocked me. But that was not all. He mocked my faith, he denied the Prophet and declared him to be a man who sometimes was bereft of his senses and at others a sensual outlaw. It is true I angered him by showing him how false the faith of the Nazarene was, but he defied me, and he spurned the Koran, and to-morrow he shall die."

Again Carew sought to obtain an audience with Sir Richard, but in vain; he knew, moreover, by the look on the Arabs' faces that their fanaticism had again become uppermost, and that unless something happened they would carry out their threat.

As a consequence, Carew went to bed that night with a heavy heart. He pleaded with the old Arab, who all along had shown more self-control than the others, but the old man's face was like adamant.

"Yesterday I would have been prepared to give him three days longer," he cried. "By that time the Sheikh ul Islam will have returned from Mecca, but now he shall go to the pit of flame. To-night I joined my persuasions to those of the Nazir. I showed him how foolish the faith of the cross was, and how all who followed it would go down into the pit. So anxious was I to save him that I became more than ever fervent in my appeal, but when I placed the cross on the ground he caught it to his heart, and flung the Holy Koran from him. He shall die, Howajja; he shall die as surely as the sun rises to-morrow."

Carew pleaded in vain, and presently, when he lay down to rest, no sleep came to him. At length, after having spent hours of useless planning, he fell into a troubled slumber.

How long he slept he did not know, but presently he was awakened by what seemed to him to be the crack of a musket, and immediately after some Arabs came to his side gesticulating wildly and talking in hoarse whispers.

Before he could realize what was happening, he was pulled from his bed, and a few minutes later he was being dragged away in a southerly direction.

"Where is Sir Richard?" he asked.

"Gone to the pit of flame, accursed by Allah."

"Where are you taking me?"

But no man answered him, and in spite of himself he found himself running between two stalwart Arabs.

## CHAPTER V

### YUSEF AND JOAN

ON the night that Sir Richard Winscombe and Bamfield Carew were surprised and taken prisoners in the Beit Allah, an Arab youth, who had acted as personal servant to Sir Richard Winscombe, and to whom the Baronet had shown many kindnesses, was walking towards Tel Moloch. He knew that his master had gone to the village with the other Englishman, in company with Vacchelli the Jew and a tall Arab. As a consequence he would not be needed for some hours, and being of a somewhat adventurous disposition, he determined that he also would make his way thither. He had been walking more than an hour when he realized that he had wandered considerably from the track which led thither. He therefore climbed to one of the peaks from which he would be able to see the minarets of the mosque, but had scarcely reached the summit when he heard sounds which caused him to stop.

He lay flat on the ground and listened.

"Two men running hard," he said, "and they are coming this way."

A second later he was on his feet again, and was looking eagerly around. Presently he gave an exclamation half of surprise, half of fear.

"The Jew and the other!" he cried. "The Jew is fat and lags behind. They were with my master. There is something wrong, a Sheikh ul Islam doth not show so much haste else."

Stealthily but rapidly he made his way towards the running men.

"Where is my master?" he asked.

The tall Arab pointed to the mosque.

"Then why are you here?"

"There is danger, death!" said the Arab.

"To whom?"

"The Englishmen."

"Then why do you leave them?"

"It is useless. We are in danger too."

"Tell me why?"

"We cannot," said the Jew, who by this time had regained his breath. "The Englishmen went to the mosque to get the Stones of Moab. Abou Ben Kebron hath been deceived; there have been spies at work."

"Tell me more," said the youth, whose name was Yusef.

"We have no time, we must away. If they catch us they will kill us."

"If you do not tell me, I will kill you," said Yusef, and he drew a knife from under his garments.

Rapidly the Jew told the story, while the Arab youth gazed at them with angry eyes.

"Cowards!" he cried, "to leave them there. You who have eaten my master's bread, and who have accepted bounty from him."

"We were surprised in a moment. Twenty there were, at the smallest calculation, who rushed in suddenly. Why should I stay to be torn limb from limb when I could do no good?"

"Coward!" said Yusef again. "As for Abou Ben Kebron, he is a coward and a liar too. You brought my master here only to get his money."

"I tell you the Englishmen would have got all they wanted if the man whom Abou had trusted had not turned traitor. The stones were all I described them to be."

"But where is my master and the other Englishman?"

"By this time in prison, perhaps dead. Who knows? We could do nothing. They were twenty, and they would have torn out our eyeballs if they had caught us."

"But they will not kill them," cried Yusef. "They love money; they will keep them for ransom."

"I know not. We will go. An hour from here I have friends, I can get horses."

The men ran on while Yusef stood watching them.

"I must find out what hath become of them," he said to himself. "I will be a faithful servant even as he hath been a good master. But I must be careful. I must not let them know I am Sir Richard's servant."

He had not gone far when he heard the sound of many footsteps and low voices.

"Go quickly, but go quietly," he heard one say. "Not one of them must leave. If any one were to go to Jerusalem,

all might be lost."

"Abdul must know," said Yusef. "I can get to him before they can. They do not know the way."

He waited until they were out of sight, and then he returned quickly to the encampment. Quickly he related what he had seen and heard.

"I will go to Jerusalem," said the dragoman.

"And if you go they will think many things," said Yusef. "You are dragoman, and they would ask where you were; but if I go, no one will think anything."

Eagerly they talked, and ere long the boy had convinced the dragoman that his plan was right.

"But take a horse," said Abdul at length.

"Horse," said Yusef. "I go faster than a horse over the mountain. I can go where no horse can go. I can find food on the way. In two days, three days, less, I will be in Jerusalem. Then I tell all. Then three days more and the soldiers will be here. Hark, they come. I go."

All that night Yusef travelled westward. Even in the light of the moon every mountain and peak seemed to be known to him. Unencumbered by baggage, and eager to cover the journey quickly, he went more than twice as quickly as the whole caravan had been able to travel towards Tel Moloch. He took but little time for sleep and rest, and in two days he had reached the Jordan close to where it empties itself into the Dead Sea. Here he found a party of travellers encamping on the western bank of the river, close to the spot where, as legend has it, Jesus of Nazareth was baptized.

Yusef went straight to the dragoman and told his story. As it happened this dragoman knew Yusef, and thus yielded to his appeal for a horse. Without delaying a second, Yusef mounted the swiftest horse that the dragoman had, and galloped across the plain in the direction of Jerusalem.

When the lad reached the *Mediterranean Hotel* it was evening, and his whole appearance gave evidence of the hardship he had endured. His feet and legs were bleeding. His face was haggard with toilsome journeyings, insufficient food and want of rest. Moreover, the horse he had ridden from the Jordan was black with sweat, and was evidently well-nigh exhausted.

"Will you tell Mam'selle, the rich Englishman's daughter—you know, he who went away east—that Yusef would see her?"

The lad spoke incoherently, but the servant understood him.

"Mam'selle Winscombe is at dinner," said the servant, "but I will tell her. You were her father's servant?"

"I was her father's servant. Go quickly, for death flies."

With swift, noiseless footsteps the servant found his way to the dining-hall of the hotel, and went straight to Joan Winscombe.

"Your father's servant, Yusef, hath come back alone. He says he would see you without a moment's delay," he said in low tones.

Immediately Joan followed him. In spite of the man's quiet ways and low voice, she knew that something terrible had happened. But Joan Winscombe was not a girl who asked foolish questions; moreover, she knew that this hotel servant would know nothing. So quietly did she leave, that her aunt, who was sitting close by, did not notice her absence.

Joan took in the situation at a glance. The lad's wild eyes and dishevelled appearance meant that something had happened; aye, and something evil.

"My father, Yusef?" she said.

"I would speak to Mam'selle alone," said the young Arab, "and I would speak quickly."

Without a second's hesitation she led him into the conversation-room, which, owing to the fact that it was dinner-time, was empty.

The young Arab told his story quickly. Never once did he hesitate for a word, and in a few minutes Joan was in possession of all the facts he had learnt.

"Then you believe my father is in great danger?"

"The greatest, Mam'selle."

"But surely they will not take his life? They would not dare."

"They dare do anything. The Jew told me they were *très fanatique*. The stones are sacred stones; if they do not kill them, they will—ah, I know not what."

"But my father will pay them well. The Arabs love money."

"True, Mam'selle, but some love their faith more. Mam'selle does not know the desert Arab. She does not know those who have never seen the English tourist, and who have learnt nothing of his ways. Besides, these people are especially religious. Their religion is everything to them. No Dervish at Mecca is so fanatical as the Nazir at Tel Moloch, no people even in Mecca love their mosque as much as the people there love their Eed Al Kurban. Besides, I have told Mam'selle only what I have heard. I have travelled without rest and but little food for many hours, so that she might know quickly. Even now it may be too late. If help goes not to the Englishmen, the Englishmen will die, I think."

Joan Winscombe thought a moment, and then went quickly to a bell rope and pulled it vigorously.

"Go and tell Sir Edward Williams that Miss Joan Winscombe would see him immediately," she said to the servant when he came.

"Sir Edward has guests to-night," said the servant.

"Nevertheless, he will come."

In this she was right, for a few seconds later the British Consul appeared.

"Something serious has happened, Sir Edward," said Joan, "else I would not have disturbed you. Yusef will you repeat to Sir Edward what you have told me?"

Yusef repeated his story, and Joan noticed that he altered scarcely a word during his second recital. When he had finished, Sir Edward Williams looked very grave.

"The lad is right," he said. "I have heard more than once that among all the believers of the Moslem religion there are none more fanatical than those who live in that district. They regard themselves as custodians of the true faith, and thus anything like sacrilege is unpardonable in their eyes. Human life is regarded lightly, but every jot and tittle of their religion is sacred. But keep a brave heart Miss Winscombe. I will go and see the Turkish authorities at once."

"You will arrange to send soldiers to release them?"

"I will do my best."

"Do you mean to say that there will be difficulty?"

"I trust not."

He moved towards the door as he spoke, and Joan noticed

the grave, anxious look in his eyes.

"One moment, Sir Edward," she said. "I do not wish this story to become the property of the gossips, and——"

She hesitated a moment, while Sir Richard broke in. "I think you are right, Miss Winscombe; for the present, at all events, the less said the better."

Before midnight a company of Turkish soldiers left Jerusalem, and travelled up the slopes of Mount Olivet towards the village of Bethany. Joan Winscombe watched them as they went. From her position on the flat roof of the *Mediterranean Hotel* she could see them plainly. The sky was clear and the moon shone brightly, so brightly that she could see the olive-trees that dotted the side of Mount Olivet, as well as the dome of the Mosque of Omar and the white roofs of the houses all around her. She had pleaded hard to be allowed to accompany the soldiers, but this Sir Edward Williams would not listen to.

"Madness, Miss Winscombe," he said "and worse than madness. Remember that the region about Tel Moloch is beyond civilization; so much so that while it is dangerous for men, it is a hundred times worse for women. But do not fear. If it is possible to bring back your father, it will be done. Every soldier has a powerful incentive to rescue both him and Mr. Carew."

"And when can I hear of him again?"

"Perhaps a fortnight, perhaps less. Remember the state of the country beyond the Dead Sea, remember what may have to be done."

Joan Winscombe loved her father. Her mother had died when she was very young, and as a consequence they were a great deal together. She had accompanied Sir Richard on his many voyages of discovery, and had shared his pleasures and his disappointments. She had often wished since her father had left her for Tel Moloch that she had gone with him, and but for the fact that she was not enamoured with the society of Bamfield Carew, she would probably have gone with him. That night, however, she felt more kindly towards Carew. It is true that their beliefs were utterly dissimilar, nevertheless she could not help admiring the young man's freedom from cant and his evident honesty. She realized, moreover, that he had a sense of humour, and that during the few days he had been with them in Jerusalem,

he had proved himself, in spite of her prejudice against him, an agreeable companion.

She found herself wondering how he bore himself during their imprisonment, and she felt sure he would do his utmost to make her father's condition as pleasant as possible. For, she could not believe that the Arabs would kill them. It is true they might be fanatical, but every Arab loved money, and she felt sure that English gold would atone even for sacrilege.

Nevertheless, she was extremely anxious, and she knew that little sleep would visit her until she heard news of her father's safety.

Days passed away, and no news came, and as each day passed she grew more anxious. She read everything at her command which threw light upon Arab character and custom and the more she read, the more she feared for her father's safety. At the end of a week she felt she could keep silence no longer. She must tell her aunt of the fears which had been haunting her. She wished that Yusef had not gone with the soldiers, so that she might have been able to question him again concerning what he had told her. But Yusef had been necessary as a guide, and thus she had to bear her secret alone.

At the end of the eighth day, however, her suspense came to an end. She was walking towards Bethany, when she saw a horseman riding swiftly towards her.

"That is Yusef!" she said, with fast-beating heart.

A minute later the young Arab had reached her side.

## CHAPTER VI

SIR RICHARD AND JOAN

SHE dared not speak, so great was her fear, but Yusef rejoiced to be the bearer of good news, and knowing the share he had taken in what had been done, said grandly :

"Mam'selle can rejoice."

"My father," she cried, "is he safe?"

"He will be here in a few hours."

"Is he well?"

Yusef assured her that no harm had befallen the man he delighted to-call master.

"But tell me, Yusef. Has he suffered? Tell me how he looked. Tell me what was done to set him at liberty."

"I know but little," said Yusef, "save that it is well I made haste. Had we been six hours later he would have been killed."

"Killed! Tell me why."

"It is not for me to tell," said Yusef. "Presently they will come—all come. I obtained permission to ride on and tell you the good news. We kept together until we crossed the River Jordan, then I rode fast. Sir Richard bid me tell you that he was safe and well."

"And Mr. Carew?" she said presently.

"He has not come."

"Not come!" said Joan in astonishment. "How is that?"

"I am only a servant, Mam'selle. I know nothing, therefore I tell nothing. But Monsieur Carew he does not come. He stays at Tel Moloch."

"But why? For a ransom? Surely the soldiers could have taken him also."

"I know nothing," said Yusef. "I am only a servant."

"But has harm come to him?"

"No: no harm has come to him; but I know nothing. Soon Sir Richard will be here; then he will tell everything. Mam'selle, I am tired. I have had but little sleep and little rest for many days; will Mam'selle forgive me if I crave leave to rest? To-morrow all my powers shall be given

to Mam'selle."

The youth bowed ceremoniously. Then, Joan having given him permission to go on to Jerusalem, he mounted his horse again and passed out of sight.

As may be imagined, a great burden had been taken from Joan Winscombe. Her father was safe, and would be with her in a few hours. For a few minutes every other thought was submerged in this, but presently she found herself wondering about Bamfield Carew. What had happened to him? She felt sure that Yusef knew more than he had told. She had noticed when she had asked him questions that he seemed anxious to get away. Perhaps it had been no easy matter to escape from the Arabs, and Carew had offered himself as a hostage until her father had sent a ransom. Yes, she felt sure that must be it. That was the only explanation possible. For the journey to Tel Moloch was at her father's instigation, and Bamfield Carew had gone only as an interested spectator. She knew too, that her father would insist on taking any blame that might be attached to them. When it came to releasing them, however, it might work out differently. She imagined that Carew was not a rich man, while her father's credit at Jerusalem was great. Therefore Sir Richard would be allowed to return in order to obtain money to pay the ransom. Meanwhile Carew was safe. Yusef had told her that no harm had happened to him.

She felt more kindly towards Carew at that moment than she had ever felt before. After all his agnosticism was only skin-deep, and his jeers at all forms of religion only the result of an unfortunate training. Probably if she had been trained a Roman Catholic, and then had been led to see how little foundation it had in fact, she would be as anti-religious as he was. Besides, she felt sure he had stood by her father, as a loyal friend, and she determined to be very kind to him on his return, so as to atone for any possible lack of courtesy on her part prior to his departure on the journey which had proved so perilous.

Joan Winscombe returned to Jerusalem with a light heart; indeed, so great was her gladness that she could no longer keep her aunt in ignorance of what she had been suffering. The moment they were alone together, therefore, she told her of all that had taken place, much to that lady's astonishment. Indeed, when Joan saw how completely the

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old lady lost control over herself, even although she knew her brother would soon return, she was more than ever glad that she had kept her own counsel during the terrible hours of waiting.

It was not until after dark that Sir Richard returned to the hotel, and his return was the occasion for much excitement. For no sooner had Joan left her aunt, than that lady had eagerly told every one she knew of the "terrible adventure her dear brother had had." Indeed, before dark that night all Jerusalem was agog with curiosity, Joan's simple story had been magnified beyond all recognition by her aunt's vivid imagination, and as the story passed from lip to lip it passed beyond all bounds of possibility.

As may be imagined, Sir Richard was besieged by excited questioners, but, Englishman-like, he made light of everything. Indeed, he showed a peculiar reserve, and in spite of all his sister's questions, told her nothing beyond what she already knew. Moreover, he complained that he was very tired, and told his sister that he intended retiring to his room immediately. Especially was he peculiarly reticent concerning Bamfield Carew. He simply said that the young man was quite safe, but that he had decided not to return to Jerusalem with him.

Presently, when he got away to his private room, he sent for Joan, who, as may be imagined, was not slow to obey his summons. When Joan sat by his side Sir Richard kissed her affectionately.

"Thank God," he said quietly.

"Have you been in great danger, father? Tell me all about it, will you?"

"Presently, my dear," said Sir Richard. "Do you know that now I am back here in civilization again, the horrors of all the things I have passed through seem more terrible than they did at the time. And yet they were bad enough then, I can assure you."

Joan did not speak. She had enough tact to wait until her father felt disposed to tell her what she was wanting to know.

Sir Richard lay back in his armchair, and Joan saw his eyelids were trembling, and that his lips were quivering. He was not a man given to express much emotion; indeed,

many regarded him as proud and unsympathetic.

"Never mind, dad, everything is over now," she said presently, "and it is good to have you back again. Don't trouble to tell me anything until you feel better; the great thing I care about is that you are safe and well."

She placed her cool hand on his forehead, and kissed him again and again. "Oh, dad, I am thankful to have you with me again. Of course, I did not tell even Aunt Martha anything of what Yusef told me, and as Sir Edward did not mention the matter no one knew anything. But I do not believe I have slept an hour on the stretch for the last week. You see, I was always imagining things, even although I could not believe that Yusef was right when he said your life was in danger. But, oh, I did pray that the soldiers might be in time."

"They were only just in time," said Sir Richard, and then he commenced his story, beginning on the night when they had camped at a little distance from Tel Moloch, and when the Arab pretending to be the Sheikh ul Islam came to his tent.

Joan listened like one entranced, and presently, when he came to the part of his story where they were told that they must choose between being put to death and accepting the Moslem faith, her excitement knew no bounds.

"But, father!" she cried, starting to her feet, "die or accept the Moslem religion! You do not——"

"Well, of course, I refused to be converted. You see—well, I couldn't do that sort of thing even to save my life."

"Of course, you couldn't. Oh, it was terrible, but, of course, you couldn't do it."

"They took two sticks, and placed them on the ground in the form of a cross," went on Sir Richard, "and they demanded that we should trample on the cross—this as a sign that we renounced Christianity, and then they demanded that we should kiss the Koran, as an expression of our acceptance of the Moslem religion."

"But what did you do? What did you say?"

"Of course, I refused. The thing was too—too ghastly for words."

"And Mr. Carew—what did he say?"

Sir Richard was silent for a few seconds.

"Mr. Carew—was—well—he had different—you see——"

and then Sir Richard ceased speaking. Somehow he could not find words to express his thoughts.

"But you do not mean to say that Mr. Carew—that is—he did not do this?"

Sir Richard was silent.

"But, father, he could not. The thought is too ghastly. Why—why——"

"You see, Carew has lost faith in all religions," said Sir Richard, like one who was trying to apologize for another. "He was reared a Romanist, and presently he was led to believe that all religions were fables—mere legends which never had any basis, save in the minds of people who lived in a superstitious age. He argued that it was pure madness to throw away his life because he refused to do something which meant nothing to him. He had his life to live, he said, and his work to do. He was only a young fellow, and, well—you can see what was in his mind. The cross was only two sticks, while the Koran contained a lot of very interesting things. He was inclined to believe in the fatalism which lay at the heart of the Moslem faith, and therefore——"

"But, father——"

"Yes, my dear?"

"He didn't do it?"

Sir Richard nodded his head.

"You mean to say that he trampled upon the—the cross?"

Sir Richard rose to his feet. "I don't like to think about it," he said; "and yet I can't help it. The scene has haunted me ever since. I try to excuse him by thinking that the cross was only a couple of dry sticks picked up on the desert. I tell myself that he not only sought to save his own life but mine. As a matter of fact, it is probable I do owe my life to what he did. He stipulated, among other things, that a week should be given to me for repentance, and it was that week which enabled Yusef to get to you and for you to see the Turkish official who sent soldiers to deliver me. I remember, too, that he did all he could for me after he regained his liberty, even although I told him in no measured terms what I thought of his action. I say I remember all these things and I try to find excuses for him; but the thing haunts me nevertheless."

The perspiration stood on Sir Richard's brow while Joan

became pale to the lips. For several minutes she did not speak. The scene which her father had described got hold of her imagination. She, too, could see the circle of Arabs. She could see the wild look in their eyes, and hear their savage cries. The cross of two dried sticks was plain before her eyes, and she could see Carew stepping into the circle, crushing down the cross beneath his heel and saying with a laugh, "By this act I renounce the false faith of the Nazarene." Like her father she tried to think lightly of it, but she could not. The thing haunted her.

"Where is he now?" she said in a hard, unmusical voice, so unlike her own that her father looked at her inquiringly.

"I do not know," said Sir Richard. "He went to stay in the house of the Sheikh of the village. He told me he was allowed to take rubbings of the sacred stones, and that he meant to study the Arab life, and then write an epoch-making book. But I fancy he was under some kind of surveillance. The old Sheikh accompanied him everywhere, and I fancy he was not to be fully trusted until I was either dead or had accepted the Moslem faith."

"Father," said Joan presently, "let us say nothing about this. Let us tell no one; it—it is too ghastly—I mean the thought of it."

"You mean that it is to be kept secret?"

"Yes, I mean that."

"Impossible, my dear."

"Why, father?"

"The servants know of it. The soldiers know of it. It was the talk of the village. I expect by this time it is the talk of Jerusalem."

"And what do they think of it?"

"Almost impossible to say. Still, I have some idea. I heard two Arab Christians talking about it yesterday. They seemed to regard it lightly. 'He can trample on the Koran and kiss the cross when he gets back to England again and thus make it all right,' they said; but then I imagine the religion of the Arabs is rather a peculiar affair."

"I feel as though I can never speak to him again," said Joan. "Oh! I know that people whom we all know do things a thousand times worse, and yet I can't rid myself of the thought of it. It is terrible. But how did you get away from them, father?"

"Of course the soldiers made it easy enough. Yusef led them to the camp where our servants were strictly guarded, but the place is so peculiarly situated that they were able to pounce upon them before they were well aware of the soldiers' presence. Then they made straight for the place of my imprisonment, and in a few minutes I was at liberty. It was all so sudden that I hardly realized what had taken place. There was a big fuss made with the old Sheikh, but I expect the whole affair will blow over, especially as there were no fatal results."

"And you did not see Mr. Carew again?"

"No; I was told that he left the village on the night I was set at liberty, and had gone away with some Arabs into the desert. I do not envy his feelings."

"And was your journey of any advantage to you? I mean, do you think the stones of any historical value?"

"I have not the slightest doubt about it. Of course, if I could have brought the stones away, I should have been able to demonstrate my theories. Or even if I could have taken rubbings or photographs of them it would have done nearly as well. Some of the heiroglyphics were very plain, and could be plainly read either by means of rubbings or photographs. I would have given almost anything to have spent a few hours of daylight behind that Mehrab. I am sure I could have convinced the Palestine Exploration Society that they made a great mistake in rejecting Vacchelli's story, and I could have thrown a great deal of light upon the ancient Scriptures. Indeed, it is a terrible disappointment to me that the journey has been so largely in vain; still, it is not without some value. My book will cause some sensation when it comes out."

"Of course the story of your adventure will add greatly to its interest."

"I suppose so. I have no doubt but that it will be discussed in the English newspapers within the next few days. I imagine there is some newspaper correspondent who will send some kind of an account to London. All the same, I would give a thousand pounds to-morrow if I could obtain some good rubbings and photographs of the sacred stones of Moab. Besides, the affair has been bungled very badly. If I had gone openly to the Sheikh instead of following Vacchelli's advice, it is possible I might have been able to

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have purchased, not only the right to photograph and to take rubbings of the stones, but I might have obtained much valuable information. As it is my work is only half done."

"Never mind," said Joan, "you all back in Jerusalem all safe and sound. And it is better to have failed in your plans than to have——"

She did not finish the sentence, but Sir Richard understood what was in her mind.

"Yes," he said; "yes, a thousand times better. I should never have respected myself again."

Sir Richard had been right in his conjecture. The next day all the English people who were in Jerusalem had heard of what Carew had done, and as the story passed from lip to lip, various opinions were expressed.

The story possessed a kind of fascination for them. The situation was peculiar, and the fact of an Englishman, who had been brought up a Christian, renouncing his faith by trampling on the cross and kissing the Koran appealed to their imagination.

"What would you have done?" asked one young Oxford fellow of another. "You hold pretty much the same views that Carew holds. Suppose you were in the power of a fanatical horde of Arabs, and they offered you your choice between death and trampling on the cross, what would you have done?"

The young fellow paused a minute. "I don't know," he said; "and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"Well, it was a jolly unsportsmanlike thing to do," was the reply. "If I did it I should feel such a mean cur all the rest of my life. I don't know why, but I should. Of course it was a tight corner; but, there, I couldn't have done it. I suppose it's sentimental and foolish, but do you know I've no desire to meet Carew again."

"Just my feelings. I don't know why. I suppose the thing's got mixed up in one's blood, and—and, well, one's mother and one's grandmother believed in Christ and the cross and all that sort of thing. I don't profess to be religious, and for that matter I seldom go to church. There's too much flummery to suit me. But still, the thought of the cross has—well—it seems kind of sacred, somehow, doesn't it?"

They were standing in the little square outside the *Mediterranean Hotel*. Near to them stood David's tower, while eastward, beyond the Mosque of Omar, they could see the village of Bethany on the summit of the Mount of Olives. At the foot of the hill lay Gethsemane, and on the left the hill of Calvary could be seen.

Both stood still for a few seconds, neither speaking another word. Perhaps there was something in the association and atmosphere of the place which impressed them.

"Do you know, Wilton," said one of them presently, "the thought of it, and perhaps it's this old city, too; but one feels as though there might be something in it after all. I wonder if there is?"

"Oh! I say, Webster," said the other, "we shall have you turning parson next. Of course, one can't help feeling that Carew didn't play the game and all that, but—but—I say there's Sir Richard Winscombe coming, let's see what we can get out of the old chap."

Each of the young men moved towards the hotel from which Sir Richard was coming.

## CHAPTER VII

### SIR RICHARD'S RETURN TO ENGLAND

BUT Sir Richard did not seem inclined to enter into a conversation with either Wilton or Webster. Evidently his experiences during the last few days had tried him sorely. The young men noticed that his face was very drawn and haggard, and that he walked less briskly than of yore. When they spoke to him concerning Carew's action, he shut his lips firmly as though he was determined to say nothing, and in spite of all their questionings he left them no wiser. On being asked whether he intended to prosecute his researches, however, he told them it was his intention to return home immediately.

"Well, I hope we shall have a great book from you, anyhow," said Webster. "You must have heaps of material, although I should imagine they would be more valuable for a novel than for a treatise. I suppose you intended to write a kind of theological book, Sir Richard?"

"Every man tries to do that if he writes at all," replied Sir Richard quietly.

"I don't quite follow you there."

"No. But every book that can be called a book at all is a theological book. When you get to the bottom of things there is no other subject. What the world calls novels are only theological treatises. What is the story of any man's or woman's life but a man's battle for or against God? Suppose you study a man's mental or moral wanderings, and the study resolves itself into the same thing. Every pot-boiler is a theologian in his own way. It may be a very small way, but that is essentially what he is. Good morning, young men."

A few days later Sir Richard started for England by way of Smyrna, Athens and Brindisi, but he did not stay long in these places; both he and Joan had a great longing to get back to England. As there was to be an autumn session in Parliament, moreover, they determined to go to their London house and stay there until December. Before they

had arrived at Dover, the following and similar paragraphs had appeared in the London papers :

Sir Richard Winscombe, the well-known antiquary and scholar, who met with the unpleasant adventure on the borders of the Arabian desert, which we fully reported in our columns some time ago, is expected to arrive in England shortly. Sir Richard is, we understand, suffering from the nervous shock he received during the week when his life hung in a balance, and when the alternative between death and accepting the Moslem religion was placed before him. Nevertheless he is well enough to proceed with the book which he planned some time ago, and to get material for which he visited the East. He will be accompanied by his daughter and sister, and will take up his residence at his London house in Cringfield Gardens. Nothing is known of Mr. Bamfield Carew, who accompanied him on his perilous journey, but no fears are entertained for that gentleman's safety.

"I wish these paragraphs did not get into the papers," said Sir Richard to Joan two days after his return.

"The newspapers must get filled up with something, dad," replied Joan.

"Yes, I know ; but just now I want to be quiet. I had intended to keep out of every one's way for at least a fortnight, and now we shall be besieged with callers."

"Perhaps not," said Joan.

"Oh ! we shall. Look at this," and he handed her a letter.

"You can be engaged," said Joan, when she had read it.

"Not when such as Carew calls. You see, I've known him for many years, and he will naturally want to know the truth about his son. I would have given anything to have kept the affair quiet, but it has evidently crept into the papers and become the talk of London. He's bringing Carew's old tutor, too. You noticed that ?"

Joan nodded.

"It's such a painful business," went on Sir Richard. "If the fellow had been killed because he preferred to play the man—well, the interview would have been easier. As it is, I feel like running away."

"They may be here at any moment, too," said Joan, scanning the letter again.

"Yes, I know," replied Sir Richard ; "I think that's what makes me so uncomfortable."

He had scarcely spoken when a servant entered, bearing two cards.

"It is they," said Sir Richard; "don't go, Joan. I feel that your presence will make this interview more easy to bear."

Two gentlemen were ushered into the room; the one a tall, handsome man of about fifty-five years of age, the other slightly younger. Although the former was to the ordinary observer a far more striking looking man, the latter was likely to obtain more notice than his companion. He was dressed in strictly clerical attire, and his dark, clean-shaven face suggested the fact that he was an Italian.

"Ah, Carew," said Sir Richard, holding out his hand, "it is little we have seen of each other these last few years, but you have scarcely altered. The old Cornish blood helps you to retain your youthful appearance, I suppose."

Mr. Carew shook the hand that Sir Richard offered him, but he did not return his pleasantry. Evidently his visit was of no pleasant nature.

"This is the Reverend Pietro Mussi," he said, turning to his companion. "I thought I would like him to be present during our interview."

"Certainly," said Sir Richard. "I am afraid I have no difficulty in guessing your reason for coming to see me. Sit down, won't you?"

"I have been worried more than I can say," said Mr. Carew. "All sorts of stories have got afloat in the papers too. One might have expected to have escaped that indignity."

"I am as sorry as you can be," said Sir Richard. "I would have done anything to have prevented it, but—but—I couldn't."

"Who knew of it besides you?" asked Mr. Carew.

"All Jerusalem knew of it. It was the talk of the Arabs, the talk of the muleteers, the talk of the dragomen. One might as well try and stop a hurricane as to stop them from talking."

"But, surely, it is not true?"

Sir Richard looked up questioningly.

"I know my son got tainted by the scepticism of a Protestant University, but he was always a sound Catholic at heart. You knew well, Father Mussi, you can bear me out in this."

"Oh, certainly," said the priest. "He was always of an

inquiring mind, and might not be quite orthodox on matters non-essential, but at heart he was always sound, perfectly sound."

Sir Richard did not speak. He called to mind Bamfield Carew's oft-expressed opinion about Father Mussi's views, but thought it best to say nothing. Moreover, as he looked at the priest's face, he thought he saw a mocking smile. He might have been mistaken, but he felt sure that Father Mussi did not share Mr. Carew's evident sorrow.

"That is why I have been sure there has been some mistake," went on Bamfield Carew's father. "If my son had been a Protestant I should not have wondered so much, but our branch of the family has always remained true to the old faith. It is true he got hold of very loose notions at Oxford, notions which made me use very strong language to him; but this—no, I cannot believe it, Winscombe."

Still Sir Richard remained silent. Protestant as he was, he noticed the implied sneer at his faith, but he reflected that the man was really disturbed.

"Would you mind—that is, could you describe to me the—the circumstances of the whole miserable business?" he asked presently.

"Hadn't we better forget it, Carew?" said Sir Richard. "I am afraid we can alter nothing by talking about it—and really, the affair is—well, not pleasant to me."

"Yes, but can't you see? I am sure you must be mistaken—there must be something behind it all."

Sir Richard looked out of the window as though watching the state of the weather, while Father Mussi looked rather bored.

"I say, Winscombe," burst out Mr. Carew presently, "be honest with me. The Protestants are making capital out of this. Some Bible-worshipping fanatic was spouting about it last night at Exeter Hall or some such place, and urged that infidelity to all that was true was the result of my faith. You are not tarred with the same brush, are you?"

"Carew," said Sir Richard, "that question is a little hard to forgive? But I remember that you are naturally disturbed by these rumours. I deprecate as much as you the miserable fanaticism which will use such an incident in a public meeting in order to disparage another's faith. It is

not for me to trace the influences which led your son to give up his religion, although"—and he looked at Father Mussi keenly—"he often spoke to me concerning his reasons for ceasing to—to believe in anything. But since you will have the truth, you shall have it," and he related the incidents which have been described in this history.

"He's no longer a son of mine," said Mr. Carew, when he had finished.

"Pardon me," said Father Mussi, "but may I say a word here? Of course, we all regret the event, we of the Church especially. But may there not have been reasons in his mind? Bamfield as I have known him is a great lover of adventure. Moreover, he was naturally desirous to understand the Arab ways and the peculiarities of the Moslem religion. And must we not bear in mind several other facts? The Bible had its birth in that region. In that desert Hagar took Ishmael, and thus the Arabian people began to be. Legend has it, too, that the burial-place of our universal mother Eve is still shown. In that region, too, the Abrahamic idea had its birth. Now, would not Bamfield desire to study the philosophy which underlay the birth of Mohammedanism? Would not his inquiring mind seek to learn the inwardness of the Moslem faith? I have just been reading the writings of Sir Richard Burton, who spent so much time in the East. Well, what was his attitude towards the Moslem faith? When travelling to Mecca, he posed as a Mohammedan; he pounded the sand with his head, and howled the Moslem prayers. He daily went to the mosques for worship, he kissed the sacred Black Stone, and entered the Kaaba, the place of answered prayer. And yet Sir Richard Burton married a good Catholic and was never outlawed from English society."

"Burton was a wild, lawless gipsy," said Mr. Carew. "He was simply a lover of adventure, and nothing more. Even if my son had been that, I think I could have forgiven him. But Sir Richard Burton, a man who loved to pose as an outlaw and even as a murderer, never crushed the cross under his feet. He never formally renounced the Christian faith."

"I was only suggesting that Bamfield might have ulterior motives in all this, Mr. Carew. Believe me, the solid substratum of Catholic faith in your son's nature will not

go for nothing ; what he did he did with mental reservation, and by-and-by he will see that the light may shine more brightly because the sun may have been hidden for awhile. He will see the beauty of truth behind the world's symbolism."

Sir Richard saw the working of Father Mussi's mind, saw, too, the reason why Bamfield Carew preferred the simple though ignorant faith of his first tutor to the sophisms of the subtle Italian.

"I tell you he is no longer a son of mine," said Mr. Carew angrily. "I am an old-fashioned English Catholic, Father Mussi, and more than that, I sprang from a family that never pretended to a falsehood for the sake of saving their skins. From this time I disown him, and he must pass out of my life."

"Until he confesses his error and returns to the fold," said Father Mussi with a smile. "I have but little doubts that when he returns to England again, this little episode will be satisfactorily explained, and that we shall find him a true Catholic at heart. *Pazienza* as we Italians say."

"Father," said Joan to Sir Richard Winscombe when their visitors were gone, "I found it terribly difficult to be civil to that Italian."

"He belongs to what is not supposed to exist," said Sir Richard, "the broad school of Catholics."

"It was easy to see that. I was deeply sorry for Mr. Carew, and I respect his uncompromising fidelity to his faith. But respect and the other man don't go together."

Sir Richard laughed. "I am glad the interview is over," he said. "Doubtless it was terrible for an ardent Romanist like Carew to hear of his son's action. Poor Bamfield, I wonder where he is now?"

"Oh, I've no doubt he's safe enough. I only hope he'll not think it his duty to call here on his return."

"Why?"

"I shall have to refuse to see him. I can't get over it, father, even yet."

"Nor I," said Sir Richard. "Why is it, I wonder? I try to convince myself that it is because he did not play the part of an English gentleman, that instead of playing the man, he played the coward; but I know it is something deeper than that, something which I cannot put into words."

I can't forget it. Often I find myself recalling the scene. I see the Arabs with wild eyes. I hear them clamouring for our death or our conversion, and I see the old Sheikh placing the cross on the ground, and I hear him saying, 'Now, then, my dear, trample upon the cross which is the symbol of the false faith of the Nazarene. Allah is mighty, and Mohammed is His apostle.' And then I hear the wood crack as it cracked amidst the exultant shouts of the Arabs. All the same I cannot refuse to see him if he comes back and calls on us."

"But I shall," said Joan.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIFE IN THE DESERT

"MAY their fathers and mothers receive the curse of Allah !"

"May every mother's son of them be cast into the pit of fire !"

"Infidel dogs, every one of them ; infidel dog also is the accursed Turk who sent them hither !"

"The insult to Allah hath not been avenged ; the unbelieving Frank goes back without either paying his debt to man or to Allah."

"Then Allah's curse will fall on us !"

"Oh ! woe, woe, woe ! Why did I stay my hand ? Why did the thought of mercy steal into my heart ? Oh ! cursed be the infidels !"

"But we have one of them, and he is now of the faithful."

"Ay, and if we be not wary and wise, he also will be taken, and then we shall miss both ransoms. Both, I tell you."

"Impossible ! They know not whither we have gone."

"There must be spies in Tel Moloch."

"May their eyeballs burn and may their tongues cleave to their mouths ! May pain gnaw at their vitals as long as they live, and may they go away to the pit of flame for ever and ever !"

Bamfield Carew heard all this, and more, as he was hurried on through the night. At first the words seemed so confused that he could make no sense of them. Presently, however, he gathered the drift of what had happened. Evidently Sir Richard Winscombe had been rescued, and he himself was being carried into the desert. Well, he was thankful for Sir Richard's safety. No doubt the baronet had treated him with scant courtesy these last few days ; but that was perhaps natural. Sir Richard had not cast off the theological swaddling-clothes of his childhood. Presently he would realize that but for him, Carew, he would have been killed ; then the baronet would be glad that he not allowed a trifle, which meant nothing, to stand in the way of saving their lives.

"Listen !"

"Praise to Allah ! All is silent."

"There is no sound? Thy right ear is somewhat deaf; place thy left ear on the ground and listen again."

"All is as silent as the spirit of the night."

"Seeing that we have acted for the best, perchance Allah may be kind to us. As the Koran saith, 'His mercy is as the morning dew, His love even as the honey which falls on the flowers.'"

"Brother, thou mightest be the Sheikh ul Islam himself. Thy words are like pearls of great price and as full of music as the sound of running waters."

"Still must we journey on. When the hour of prayer comes, the people of El Tulim should be so near that we can touch them with our hands."

"It is well. Onward, then!"

The great canopy of the sky, speckled with stars, hung in cloudless beauty over their heads. The night was moonless, but they could see the mountain-range on the westward side and the great desert on the east. They no longer travelled rapidly. Having made sure that they were beyond the possibility of pursuers, the Arabs came to the conclusion that they need not try their horses too much. Moreover, the spirit of the night seemed to forbid rapid riding, and Bamfield Carew, wondering as he did what the Arabs intended to do with him, felt awed by what he saw. During the last few days he had been playing at being a Moslem for the sake of keeping up appearances, but that night he felt that he was nearer the heart of the Moslem faith than ever he had been before. The immanence of a Supreme Being became almost a reality to him, and to submit completely to His will was surely the true philosophy of life.

For some time they rode on silently; even the Arabs scarcely spoke ever a word. Perhaps they were thinking of the old Arabian legends, which exert as powerful an influence on their minds to-day as they did when the *Arabian Nights* was written. Presently, however, Carew saw that the eastern sky was changing colour. From black-blue it became transformed into purple, and violet, and amber, and then the red disc of the sun lifted itself above the horizon.

The Arabs yawned and stretched their arms; one began to sing aloud, and another gave a cheery laugh. In a few minutes there had been a change from black night to broad day.

No sooner was the sun clear above the horizon than Carew heard the voice of one of the Arabs crying aloud :

"God is the only God. God is mighty. His mercy endures for ever towards His faithful ones. To prayer ! To prayer !"

Carew threw himself on the ground with the rest. He placed his forehead on the sands and cried aloud. He did not fail to notice the others, however, and no sooner had they risen from their knees than he did likewise.

As the Arabs rose from the earth they looked intently towards the direction from which they had been travelling, and as Carew's eyes followed theirs he knew they had not been followed. Away in the distance he saw the towers and minarets of the great mosque at Tel Moloch, and as the light increased he could also see the squalid village that lay at its feet. But between them and the village not a soul was to be seen. There lay the vast expanse of land, while, beyond, the mountains lifted their peaks into the sky ; but even as no sound broke the silence, neither was there anything to be seen which called for notice.

"Allah is merciful. No harm hath happened, no jinns have appeared, and we are not followed. May Allah be praised !"

"Allah be praised !" repeated the others.

"But I am cold and hungry, brother," said one, "and El Tulim is yet an hour away. Let us hasten on."

"And I also have a wife there whom mine eyes have not rested on for many days."

At this there was a great laugh, and conversation followed which showed how little effect the prayers of a few minutes before had upon them.

But Bamfield Carew did not appear to notice this ; instead he rode on, planning how he could escape the Arabs, who evidently had plans concerning him.

A little later they entered a squalid village, where they were quickly surrounded by troops of dirty women, and children. Men were there also, but they remained on the outskirts of the crowd and watched.

Ere long, a tall, lean old man, with a long white beard, came up.

"Allah be praised, my children. You come from Tel Moloch ?"

"Yes, father."

"It is well, my dears ; and who is this stranger with fairer skin than thine, and whose beard is not the colour of the beard of the Prophet ? "

"He is a guest of thy bounty, learned father, until Ibrahim, son of Asmar, can find his way thither. As for us, we would have food for ourselves and our cattle."

"But the stranger is a Frank, and he hath the air of a Nazarene."

"He was a Nazarene, but he is now of the faithful. Seven days ago he accepted the true faith and trampled on the cross which is the symbol of the false faith of the Nazarene."

"Is it true, my son ? " said the old man to Carew.

"That I am of the faithful, father ? Yes."

"And hast thou trampled on the cross, tell me that, my son ? Didst thou crush beneath thy feet the accursed symbol of a false faith ? "

Carew noticed that the old man put the question with great eagerness ; his eyes glittered, and his voice trembled.

"Yes," he replied, and he could not repress the uncomfortable feeling that came into his heart, "I did."

"May Allah be praised. May His truth prevail, and may His prophet Mohammed, and all his faithful followers be blessed. When Ibrahim, son of Asmar, finds his way thither, we will talk much together, and you shall tell me of the evil ways of those who believe in the false faith of the Nazarene."

Throughout the rest of the day Carew was left much alone, but he knew he was watched continuously. Evidently he was not trusted, and the escape of Sir Richard Winscombe increased their determination not to allow him to escape.

Several days passed away before the old Sheikh, Ibrahim, son of Asmar, found his way to El Tulim, during which time Carew found the time hang heavily upon his hands. The life was monotonous in the extreme. Moreover, the customs of the people were extremely distasteful to him. It is true they belonged to the same sect of Moslems as those of Tel Moloch, and were therefore extremely religious ; but Carew failed to notice that their long prayers and their obedience to the religious laws had any effect upon their lives. He went daily to the mosque and offered his prayers with the

rest, but when the prayers were over he could not help reflecting that, in spite of their evident earnestness, they revelled in speech that made him shrink from them with loathing. It was true the old Sheikh was, in his way, a good man, yet even he looked upon the women of the village as mere chattels of traffic. In spite of himself he could not help noticing the standard of religious life in England was utterly different from the standard there. In order to keep up appearances, he read the Koran daily; but perhaps owing to his early associations and the bias of his mind, the writings of the great prophet of the East became so much foolishness.

He found, too, that even among those who prayed longest and loudest there was an actual gloating over those debased phases of life which, in England, he had never heard mentioned, save by those who were dead to shame and dead to decency.

Still, in a way he enjoyed himself. The life, although monotonous, was strange, and revealed to him in ways unthought of the aspirations and feelings of these desert people. At the end of three days he could not help realizing one thing. Short as the time had been since he had ceased to converse with Sir Richard, he could not help making a mental note of it. It was that he was lowering his standards as to the value of human life. He found it impossible to think of men and women as he had thought of them in England. What made the difference he could not tell, but the fact existed. The cruelty, the neglect, the savage deeds that were done, did not move him as they would have moved him at home. He realized in an unaccountable way that religion could be divorced from morality. He knew that even in England profession of faith was often unaccompanied by purity of morals, but there such a state of things seemed contradictory; in El Tulim, however, all was different. He found that in the mosque at El Tulim was a sacred stone, somewhat resembling the sacred Kabash at Mecca, and it was believed that if a faithful Moslem prayed while touching this stone, his prayers could not fail to be answered; but this prayer must be offered at a certain hour, and in a certain position. As a consequence the worshippers rushed with great eagerness to this sacred place, and so anxious were they to occupy the coveted places that they fought with fists and knives, in order to get there first. More than once had

he seen men bleeding and lacerated because of their struggles to gain place of prayer ; again and again had he seen men fight like devils, in order to kneel first at what they believed to be a sacred place.

Presently, after much waiting, the old Sheikh from Tel Moloch appeared, and to Carew's great joy, he brought with him some of his clothes. As yet he was in doubt as to what the Arabs intended to do with him. He knew that in spite of his daily prayers, and his apparent eagerness to learn the distinctive teachings of the Moslem faith he was far from safe. The Arabs regarded him with suspicious eyes. They could not understand his cynical smile and easy good humour. His English ways were strange to them. On one occasion an Arab had attacked him with knife uplifted, because he had interfered with him when he was maltreating an animal, and had not Carew been a strong man he would certainly have been killed. On another he was in danger of his life, because he had hinted that Christians lived better lives than Mohammedans. Still, on the whole, he was treated with kindness, and although life became terribly monotonous he did not complain.

"It is now time, my dear, for you to pay your ransom," said Ibrahim, son of Asmar, to him one day.

"Very well," said Carew eagerly, too eagerly in fact, "my only means of getting money is in Jerusalem ; I will go there at once, and place it in your hands."

"May Allah be merciful and bounteous to Mohammed, and all the children of his loins ; and may Allah preserve all the faithful from the pit of flame," returned the old Arab ; "but although the Mosque of Omar is in Jerusalem, yet are there many infidels there. Many Jews, and many accursed Nazarenes."

"But I have given you my word that the two hundred pieces of gold which you demanded shall be given."

"Allah is the only Allah," said Ibrahim, son of Asmar, "but it hath been known that even the faithful have been led to doubt the Koran in Jerusalem. Therefore, my dear, it might be that you, who are yet but a child in the faith, might begin to doubt when you have mingled with the Franks who are so numerous in Jerusalem."

"But you do not mean to keep me here always ?" said Carew, almost anxiously, for although he had waited

patiently for an opportunity of escape, none had come to him.

"And what more may a man desire, my dear, than that which we offer you? Perchance, my dear, you have much gold in England."

"Not much; I am not rich," replied Carew.

"But say," said Ibrahim, "the sum I have mentioned will not leave you penniless?"

"No, there may be a little left," replied Carew, with a smile.

"Ah," said Ibrahim, noting the smile, "then what is to keep you from remaining here with us? Think, my dear. There are daughters of the faithful men whom you can take to wife. As you are rich you can have two, or three, or four. These will minister to your every need. They will gather your fruit, make your bread, weave your clothes, and be light unto your eyes. I myself have a daughter who is fair to look upon, who, if I mistake not, hath cast eyes of love upon you. Then Moyaed Abou el Naser hath a daughter, whose eyes shine like stars, and whose teeth are as pearls. She also——"

"Stop," said Carew, and at that moment he thought of Joan Winscombe, "I am not a marrying man, and I have no desire for a wife."

"And yet there are no servants like wives," said the old Arab, "I am told that the Christians allow a man but one wife, and that she claims to be treated as an equal of a man. Accursed must be the faith that teaches such a thing, when even Mohammed had doubts whether a woman has a soul. But with us all is different. It is the wife who bears the burdens, who plants our farms, and tends our vines, while the man follows his pleasure. Therefore, my son, would it not be well for you to live among Allah's faithful ones? You could bring your money to us, and in time you could have a great household, with wives and many sons. My daughter is indeed fair to look upon."

"I am not a marrying man," repeated Carew.

"Then," went on the old man, "with your money you could buy horses and camels, and you could make the great pilgrimage to Mecca; you could stand in the place of answered prayer. Then would contentment, and peace, and prosperity be with you for ever. Your wives would be loving, and true, and your sons would be many."

"But meanwhile," said Carew, "how may I pay my two hundred pieces of gold that I may atone for the wrong I have done to you."

At this Ibrahim's eyes glistened, nevertheless he was silent for a few seconds. Then he said: "The rich infidel—may Allah's curse rest upon him, and not upon the faithful—hath left Jerusalem!"

"Ah," said Carew, for although he had asked many times concerning Sir Richard, he could obtain no information.

"Aye, he hath left. I am told that the Christians in Jerusalem are waiting to tear out thine eyeballs."

Carew laughed quietly. "Why?" he asked.

"Because thou hast trampled on the accursed symbol of a false faith," replied the old Arab.

Carew shrugged his shoulders, but he only said, "Then how can I obtain the money?"

"That is easy," replied the Arab. "You can write a letter to the place where you have put your gold. You can tell the people there to give the money to the faithful messengers whom we can send."

Carew was silent for a few seconds. He was thinking deeply.

"To-morrow we will return to Tel Moloch again," continued Ibrahim, "for I have learnt that no attempt to take you away from us will be made. And let me tell you this Ismayl, son of Absach, hath rich land, and he will sell it for three hundred pieces of gold. When you have bought it you can take wives from among our daughters. My own daughter is very fair to look upon"; and Carew could not help noticing the look of greed in the old Arab's eyes.

"Great is your goodness to me," said Carew, "but I feel I am not worthy. Who am I that I should have as a wife the daughter of one so great as you?"

"But I would confer honour on you, my dear, and I would show my trust. As yet there are many who doubt your faith. They complain that you never pray save at the appointed times, and that never once have you risen in the night to offer your devotions. But let them see your earnestness. Take unto you wives from the daughters of the faithful; then will the tongue of anger be silenced and the smile of Allah will be upon you. As I told you, Khamoor, my daughter, is very fair to look upon, and although many

have sought her, I would not demand great presents from you when you take her to wife. Two hundred pieces of gold will be but little to you, yet for them you shall have my daughter and my blessing."

Although Carew could scarcely help laughing, he saw that his position was not free from seriousness, especially as, before the day was out, he discovered that Ibrahim, son of Asmar, Sheikh of Tel Moloch, had informed many that it was his purpose to give his daughter Khamoor to be the wife of the Englishman who had trampled on the cross and denounced the false faith of the Nazarenes.

"All praise to Allah, my dear, and may you have many sons," said the old Sheikh of El Tulim to him not long after his interview with Ibrahim; "and may the daughter of Ibrahim and thine other wives be very obedient and slow of speech."

"But seeing I have not spoken to the daughter of Ibrahim, nor for that matter have I ever seen her face, is not this a little premature?" said Carew, with a laugh.

"Ah, but Ibrahim hath told me his will, and you have much gold in England. What then? Our Sheikh ul Islam is old, and thou art yet a stranger amongst us; but if, like our father Job, thou hast a great household and much possessions, what is to hinder you from becoming great—ay, even Sheikh ul Islam?"

All this amused Carew very much, yet he could not help regarding it with seriousness. He noticed that while some of the Arabs looked at him angrily, especially the young men, others paid him much homage. Especially was this the case when he had written a letter to his bankers at Jerusalem, which letter was being taken by some of Ibrahim's faithful servants.

"We will return to Tel Moloch to-morrow," said Ibrahim, "and although our daughters are veiled from the eyes of men, yet because I will give her to you to wife, you shall this night see her face. Then when the messengers have returned from Jerusalem with the gold, the arrangements for the marriage-day shall be made, and that with all speed."

That night, after he had made his preparations for starting for Tel Moloch on the following morning, Carew realized something which for the time completely shocked him. He saw that Ibrahim was perfectly serious in his deter-

mination that he should marry Khamoor his daughter, and as he thought of the means whereby he might be able to escape the situation, which was becoming more and more difficult, it came to him that what under other circumstances might be something to laugh about was now assuming an aspect positively repugnant. The reason was the fact that he discovered the state of his heart. He loved Joan Winscombe.

Hitherto he had only thought of her as one who seemed to dislike him, and who had shown but little pleasure in his society. Now he knew that he loved her so much that life could never be the same to him again.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE JOURNEY TO DAMASCUS

WHEN, the next evening, Bamfield Carew returned to Tel Moloch, it was with many misgivings. He saw that Ibrahim regarded him with an air of proprietorship, and that he spoke of his coming marriage with Khamoor, whose face he had never seen, as an accomplished fact. The old man evidently believed that Bamfield was possessed of great wealth, and that, seeing he was now by profession a Moslem, he would be a suitable husband for his daughter.

But for the fact of this discovery of his love for Joan Winscombe, Bamfield Carew would have laughed at the whole business, but now it was no laughing matter. There could be no doubt about it, Ibrahim saw to it that he was guarded carefully, so much that escape seemed impossible. He felt, therefore, that he would have to be very careful, and under no circumstances to arouse the suspicions of his intentions. For Carew had determined to get away by some means. His willingness to write to Jerusalem for money was because of the plans that had been born in his mind. He knew that Ibrahim would not urge marriage upon him until his money came from Jerusalem, and it was for him to see to it that before any nuptials could be finally arranged he must get away from Tel Moloch.

But this was not easy. On the one hand was the interminable waste of the desert, while on the other was the wild mountain range over which he had already travelled. He could therefore take neither of these directions. The desert was an unknown world to him, while if he tried to cross the mountain range these fleet-footed Bedouins would overtake and capture him with ease.

After supper that evening Khamoor was presented to him. As she was to be his wife her face was unveiled, and although Carew was not prepared to regard her with much favour, he could not help being struck by her beauty. Dark she was almost to swarthinness, but her face was a perfect oval and her features were very pleasing. She had an abundance of long black hair, which hung in heavy masses over her neck and shoulders and down her back. Her eyes

were large and refulgent, in which was a look of eager expectancy.

She came and knelt at Carew's feet. She kissed his hand, and then placed it upon her head.

"May I find favour in my lord's eyes," she said, "and may I be very obedient."

A feeling of pity came into Carew's heart. "I wish she were old and ugly," he said to himself, "for then I could laugh at the whole business; but evidently she has been told much about me, and she looks upon me as a sort of demi-god. All the same, I'll warrant Khamoor could use the knife on provocation."

Still, he patted the child's head—for she was but little more than a child—and told her to be a good girl, on which she rose and walked away as though her duties were over.

For several days Carew kept much alone. He was very careful, however, to go regularly three times a day to the mosque for prayer, and he paid great attention to the exhortations of the Nazir, who expounded the Koran. He also made voluminous notes concerning the modes and habits of the people, and also gained much information concerning "the stones of Moab," which had been the occasion of his strange adventure. He had also been able to develop the many photographs he had taken, not only of the exterior and interior of the mosque, but of the stones themselves, as well as of their resting-place. Evidently Carew determined to make the most of his opportunities, which since the rumour of his forthcoming marriage with Khamoor, had been many. The Nazir especially had placed in his hand many valuable manuscripts containing the history and legends of the Eed Al Kurban. He had also told him of the many rites and beliefs which differentiate the faithful of Tel Moloch from the other believers in the Moslem faith. Altogether Carew had gathered a mass of valuable material, material which Sir Richard Winscombe would have given thousands of pounds to obtain.

"But for this madness of old Ibrahim, I would follow Burton's example and make a pilgrimage to Mecca," he said to himself, again and again. "This country, in spite of its terrible desolation, is a very storehouse of romantic lore; but the old man's matrimonial designs have made that impossible."

But it was not only this which made him desire to leave Tel Moloch with all speed. Even although he tried to fight against his love for Joan Winscombe, his heart was yearning for her. He was longing to get back to England, and he often found himself thinking how he could approach her and how he could explain away the act which had so incensed Sir Richard.

"I hope they have forgotten all about that business before now," he said. "After all, even if it is not forgotten, it will only be remembered as an episode in my life; besides——" And then he would go over all the arguments by which he had tried to excuse himself.

Once he went to the spot where he had trampled on the cross, and then he was angry with himself. He could not explain why, for he was no more a believer in Christianity now than before; but he felt as though a knife were driven in his heart. He saw the spot where his heel had sunk into the earth, and where the cross had been crushed beneath his foot. He also felt, as he had felt then, that sharp choking feeling at the throat, that shudder which passed through his frame.

"How these old superstitions do stick to one," he said, as he walked away, "I don't believe in the story; I have discarded the whole business years ago as a tissue of childish fables, and yet I hate to think of that night. I wonder what Joan said when Sir Richard told her what I did?"

Presently the messengers arrived from Jerusalem. They brought back letters from the bank and a package which old Ibrahim was very anxious to possess. But Carew was firm in his refusal; indeed, he grew so angry at Ibrahim's greed that the old man, fearing lest Carew should appeal to the Sheikh ul Islam, who was expected daily, thought wise not to persist. He reflected that he would be able to do more by subtle flattery and careful dealing than by open force, and so had to content himself with the two hundred pieces of gold, which was the sum agreed upon for Carew to pay.

The old man was anxious, however, for him to buy Ismayl's farm without delay; but here, again, Carew found reasons for delay. One thing, however, he did. He bought the fleetest and best horse to be found in the region of Tel Moloch. He did not parade this fact, however; and when

he spoke of his bargain and of the money he had spent he excused himself on the plea that, while being no great horseman, he had a great love for horses.

The news that money had reached him from Jerusalem had caused him to be the most popular man in Tel Moloch. Young and old thronged around him with the eternal cry of "Backsheesh," and each vied with the other as to who would render him service.

"The Sheikh ul Islam will be here in four days now," said Ibrahim. "You will then be able to complete your purchase of Ismayl's farm, and on that same day you can take Khamoor to be your wife. Ah! my son, Allah is wise, and it is well for you that you came to Tel Moloch, even although you came to do an evil thing. But your conversion hath appeased the wrath of Allah, and now you shall become great among the faithful."

"I assure you, O Ibrahim, son of Asmar, that I am unworthy," replied Carew. "Yet do I rejoice in your trust, and I assure you I will prove worthy of it."

"Ah! then," said Ibrahim, "you have agreed with Ismayl concerning his farm?"

"He has offered it to me for a price, but I find that I shall have to ask the Sheikh ul Islam many things before the bargain can be concluded. Moreover, I am not sure it is a good investment."

"It is the best farm in Tel Moloch, and the house thereon is worthy even of the daughter of my fourth wife, who, although the youngest of all my wives, was yet dearest to me. A little shrill of voice and bitter of tongue she was, but no one could please me with food like she could. And Khamoor hath learnt her secrets."

One day a black-eyed youth came to him and said, "I would speak to you in secret, Howajja?"

"Speak on," said Carew.

"Howajja does not love the daughter of Ibrahim, son of Asmar: she whose face is like the moon and whose voice is as the falling water on a windless night."

"What then, Ismayl, son of Ismayl?" asked Carew.

"Howajja seeks to buy my father's farm. It was his father's farm before him, and his father's father's. The farm is very dear to me, Howajja—ah! but the farm is not so dear to me as Khamoor, she of the moon-face."

Carew looked at him eagerly.

"What would Ismayl, son of Ismayl, love best in the world?" he asked.

"To have Khamoor as my wife and live on my father's farm," replied the youth, with ardent eyes. "But do not mock me, Howajja. My father owes more than the worth of one hundred pieces of English gold. Therefore is he willing to sell the farm. But think not that you will live if you marry Khamoor, for within thirty days of the day she becomes your wife I will drive a knife into your heart!"

"Which would be a very unpleasant sensation for me," said Carew, after which he asked Ismayl, son of Ismayl, many questions.

"We have been long enough together," said Carew presently; "but before we separate, will you swear an oath to me?"

"I will swear to any oath, if I may wed Khamoor and keep my father's farm," said the youth; "but that I cannot do unless I obtain one hundred pieces of gold. And how can I get them, Howajja? I cannot buy followers, that I may rob a caravan; besides, infidels do not come here, and a faithful Moslem may not rob one of his faith—unless it is very easy to do so," he added. "Therefore, how can I get the one hundred pieces of gold?"

"And if I tell you how you can get the gold, you will take the oath I shall tell you of?"

"I will take any oath," said Ismayl.

Carew looked around him and saw that they were alone and that no eye watched them.

"Place your hand under my thigh," said the young man remembering their form of oath.

Ismayl did as he was bidden.

"Now say after me," said Carew, and Ismayl repeated these words which Carew spoke:

"With my hand under thy thigh, I swear by Allah, who alone is holy, and by Mohammed, who was Allah's last and final prophet, that I, Ismayl, son of Ismayl, will, on condition that you give me one hundred pieces of gold and give up all thought of wedding Khamoor, daughter of Ibrahim, son of Asmar, by his fourth wife Laah, do all that you bid me in helping you to get away from Tel Moloch. I swear that I will tell no man what you will tell me, and I will do all things

which are not forbidden by the Koran which may help you in your designs. I swear that I will be faithful to you in all that I promise, and may the curse of Allah rest upon me if I in anything fail, and may I burn in the pit of flame for ever and ever."

The next night Bamfield Carew was galloping northward towards Damascus, with such possessions as he valued most, while Ismayl sat alone counting his gold and dreaming of the time when he should take Khamoor to be his wife.

For Ismayl was able to do for Carew what the young man was unable to do for himself. He led the young man's horse to a secluded spot outside the village, and he also arranged for a conference between Ibrahim and his father, whereby Carew was free from the old man's watchful eyes. He also bargained with the desert fortune-teller who was then just near Tel Moloch, and who only spoke on rare occasions, to declare himself ready to read the future of all the men who might come to him. This had the effect of practically emptying the village, for he would not speak within a mile of the shadow of a house; and as he was a man most wise, and moreover was believed to have great power over evil jinns and bad spirits of the desert, there was scarcely a man who did not rush to his side.

Thus Carew was able to gather together the things he valued most, and before the people knew of his departure he was many miles north of Tel Moloch, and travelling as fast as the best horse in the whole vicinity could carry him. Moreover, as he kept on the edge of the desert, where the ground was level, he was able to make a good pace. He had the north star for his guide, and he hoped that in three days he would be in Damascus, where he would be comparatively safe from danger.

Of Carew's journey to Damascus there is no necessity to write in detail. That it was a hard and difficult journey may be well imagined. Fountains of water were scarce, and even if they were not, he did not know where to find them. Added to that, the country was practically unpopulated. Save for bands of marauding Bedouins, and an occasional squalid village close to the mountain range, no signs of life were visible.

At length he came within the zone of comparative civilization, and then he felt as though a great burden had

rolled from his shoulders. But even then a danger confronted him which he did not realize. It came about in this way. When within but a day's journey of Damascus he came across a caravan which was travelling thither. He was at the time wanting food both for himself and his horse, and so he attached himself to the company.

Carew looked around among the members of the caravan, and then, in spite of the fact that he had learnt to school himself in the art of dissimulation during the last few weeks, he could not help giving a start of surprise. Before him stood Vacchelli the Jew and Abou Ben Kebron.

## CHAPTER X

### CAREW'S HOME-COMING

THAT night Vacchelli the Jew found occasion to speak with Carew.

"How did you get away?" asked the Jew in English, "and where is Sir Richard Winscombe?"

Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"Is Sir Richard at Tel Moloch still or is he killed?"

"Sir Richard is in England I expect by this time," and Carew noted the gleam in the Jew's eyes.

"Tell me what happened, tell me how you escaped! Abou Ben Kebron said they would kill you both."

"I am still alive, you see."

"And you have money. But we have none; no, not a single bishleck. All that Sir Richard gave Abou is gone; and although we travel to Damascus in safety, yet when we get there we starve unless some one helps us."

Carew did not speak.

"Give us some gold," went on the Jew, "and we will say nothing, nothing."

"It would not pay you to do so. You see I could tell a story too."

"But that would not avail you."

"Why?"

"Because you are a Christian."

"And if I am rightly informed you profess to be Christian, converted from the errors of Judaism," said Carew.

"Ah! but I have renounced my errors; I have embraced the Moslem faith. I can swear by all that is holy in the Moslem religion, that I am no longer Christian."

"So can I," said Carew.

"But you are not a Moslem. I am. Abou Ben Kebron hath converted me."

"So am I," said Carew.

"Ah! you tell me a lie," said the Jew.

"Look here, Mr. Vacchelli," said Carew, "I don't want to kick up a row, and I want to get to Damascus without further mishap, but if you repeat those words again I shall

dirty my fist by bringing it into contact with your none too beautiful features."

"Ah! then I withdraw, but how can——"

"Enough," said Carew. "I tell you I am a Moslem as much as you are. Perhaps a little more. The truth is we all want to get to Damascus, and if you hold your tongues I will help you when we arrive there. But if you breathe a word—well, you know what will happen. A Mohammedan respects the English, but he hates the Jew. And you know that if Abou's story became known, his life would not be worth five minutes' purchase."

A few minutes later when they separated both the Jew and Abou Ben Kebron were convinced that they would gain nothing by threatening Carew, but that they would be wise if they treated him with profound respect.

Two days later Carew was installed in one of the hotels of Damascus, which was almost entirely patronized by European visitors. Here he was able to obtain suitable clothes, and to so metamorphose himself that no one would have recognized him as the man who joined the Arab caravan two days before. It is true that the proprietor of the hotel, who was a Greek, regarded him at first with some amount of suspicion; but the sight of money soon quieted his fears, and Carew was able, after his strange experience in the desert, to settle down as a civilized European once more.

He did not, however, stay in Damascus long, and ere many days were over he was on his way to Beyrout, where he knew that boats frequently called whereby he could get back to England.

He had helped Vacchelli and Abou Ben Kebron as he had promised, all the same he thought it wise to get rid of them as soon as possible.

"We are a trio of Moslems, Vacchelli," he said, "but neither of us do any credit to our religion. Tell me now, how much you believe in it?"

"Ah, Father Abraham," said the Jew, "but it was my only chance of safety. You know now what these Arabs of the desert are. When I get back to England again, ah, then—well, who knows? But Abou compelled me to be converted. He refused to travel with me, unless I always swore by Mohammed. He is one of the most faithful Moslems

I know. He never misses prayers, and he knows the Koran as well as I know the Jewish Scripture. He is also learned in all points of Moslem doctrine. He would have murdered me if I would not swear by Mohammed."

"And yet Mr. Abou Ben Kebron is one of the prettiest liars I am acquainted with," said Carew, "besides being as arrant a knave as you will find between Damascus and Bagdad, which is saying a great deal."

"Ah! what, would you, Mr. Carew? You see he wants to make the best of both worlds. Abou loves gold, and he wants to get to Paradise. Ah, Mr. Carew, I never knew how lovely Paradise could be until I heard Abou describe it! But say, you go back to England soon?"

"Yes, immediately."

"And you will see me there some day. I think I shall have much to say to Sir Richard, and he will thank me, for was I not a faithful servant? Perhaps we shall not be Moslems when we are in England, Mr. Carew?"

Carew replied in language more expressive than elegant. It angered him to think that, after all, he and the Jew belonged to the same category.

"And I say, Mr. Carew, let us say nodding of our religious opinions when we meet in England. My brethren in England hated me for being a Christian, for my people are very bigoted: they would hate me more for being a Moslem. But, ah! they do not know how I was tried!"

Carew did not linger long on his journey to England. The boat from Beyrout took him to Piræus, whence, after spending two days in Athens, he took train for a port near ancient Corinth, and then proceeded to Brindisi by boat. Within a week of leaving Brindisi he was seated in one of his London clubs.

"This is comfort, after all," he said to himself, when after having dined he made his way to the smoking-room and lit a cigar.

"I must try and see Joan Winscombe soon," he mused presently. "Sir Richard will have forgotten his bitterness by this time, and he will be anxious to know how I fared. Besides, even although he may be still a little angry with me, he will soon be mollified when I show him my treasures. Even if I have not been able to bring the stones of Moab with me, I shall be able to show him splendid photographs, which

will be almost as valuable to him. Besides, I shall be able to tell him what he would give his ears to know. Neither he nor I ever dreamed of the information that old fool of a Nazir was able to impart. Oh yes, in half an hour I'll charm away his bitterness, and warm his heart by offering him practically all that he went to Tel Moloch for. After that there will be no difficulty in getting Joan to talk with me."

Still there was an uneasy look in his eyes, as though he were not quite sure of Joan's feelings towards him. He had noted her coldness towards him in Jerusalem, when there seemed no apparent reason for dislike; how then would she regard him after hearing what her father would be sure to tell her?

"I wonder what he said?" thought the young man, "I suppose I seemed a bit of a coward. But after all it was not cowardice. One religion was the same as another to me; why then should I throw away my life for a fad? Besides I wanted to get some good copy, and I've got it. Still, Joan is no ordinary girl. She's not of the 'smart set' order, who don't care a tinker's cuss about religious matters. And, by Jove, I never could have believed that I could be so gone on a girl. It was the thought of marrying Khamoor that revealed to me the true state of my feelings. I would not throw away my life for a religious sect, but for Joan I would——" And there was a look in Bamfield Carew's eyes which showed his love for Joan Winscombe was no passing fancy.

"Still, I'll find my way to Cringfield Gardens very soon," he went on. "Those pictures and manuscripts will be talismen that will open the door of their house, and I hope also the door of his heart."

At that moment two young men passed him, and sat down at a small table close by.

"Ah, Webster," said Carew, starting up, "when did you get back?"

"Oh, several weeks ago," replied Webster coolly.

"It seems an age since I saw you both in Jerusalem," said Carew.

"Yes, I dare say it does."

"Well now, tell me, you fellows, what has happened. You see I have only just come back and know nothing."

"What has happened? What do you mean? Politi-

cally? Well, there are all the back numbers of *The Times* and *The Spectator*. They can tell you better than I."

"Oh, I don't mean anything about politics. I mean the news generally."

"Well, I am given to understand that one of the chief items of news in London some weeks ago was about yourself."

"About me?"

"About you."

Carew could not help realizing that the two young men had not received him warmly. There was a feeling of coolness and restraint, which never characterized their previous meetings.

"I did not know that I was of such importance," he said, laughing uneasily.

"Oh, the papers were full of you."

"The papers?"

"Yes."

"The London dailies?"

"Yes, the London dailies. I am told that each and all had paragraphs about you. I believe the religious papers had leading articles."

"You are joking."

"Nothing of the sort. You see, the paragraphs referred in the main to Sir Richard Winscombe. They described his journey to some out-of-the-way, savage Arab village to which you had both gone to obtain some ancient stones. They also told how you were pounced upon by some fanatical Moslem sect who accused you of outraging their religion, and as a consequence that you, according to the old Moslem order of things, were offered your choice between death or conversion. Sir Richard, of course, was praised for remaining true to the best traditions of English gentlemen, while you, well, the remarks were not quite so complimentary."

"Was this in the papers?"

"We did not get back for a week or two after the appearance of the news, but I judged that all the papers printed it. Was not that your impression, Wilton?"

"Certainly," replied Wilton.

"But, but——"

"Well, what?"

"Why, no sensible man condemned me, surely?"

"Depends what you mean by 'sensible man.'"

"But no one regarded it seriously save a few religious faddists?" and the tone of Carew's voice showed that he was becoming uneasy.

"I should not like to say that."

"Well, tell me what was said?"

"What, in the papers?"

"Yes, and among the people we know."

"As I told you, we did not get back until after the news appeared in the papers, and therefore there was not so much talk about it. But if you ask me my thoughts concerning the views of the people generally they were not over complimentary."

"Why, no one believes in Christianity nowadays."

"No? Well, there seems to be a large percentage of people who appear to think otherwise."

"But—but I say, Webster! Why the whole thing is absurd. I don't believe in Christianity, neither do you, neither do scores of people we know. Well, suppose you had a howling, screaming, evil-smelling, evil-eyed, murderous horde of Moslem fanatics around you swearing that if you did not give up something which was in reality nothing to you, you would be murdered, what would you do? It was nothing to me, and I told 'em so. Besides, I had obtained a lot of good copy, and I saw my way to getting some more."

"Well, it seems that Sir Richard wanted good copy too," remarked Webster.

"Yes, but Sir Richard belongs to the old school, and in a way holds to the old superstitions."

"And is an English gentleman to boot," said Wilton.

"What do you mean?"

"Only that—well, Sir Richard was referred to as a man who was true to those high principles which have made the English race respected all over the world," remarked Wilton.

"And—and—do you mean that I was referred to as one, well, who did not——"

"Just so," said Wilton, as Carew hesitated for a word.

"It was remarked," said Webster, "that it had always been an Englishman's boast that he played the game fairly."

"While I did not."

"Something like that."

"Nothing stronger than that?"

"Yes, there were things a good deal stronger than that said."

"But not at the houses we are in the habit of visiting?"

"Yes, I remember going to old Lady Briarfield's just after we returned. It was at a bridge party. I suppose Lady Briarfield and her set are regarded as—not over squeamish; but, well—the remarks were all in favour of Sir Richard."

"But Lady Briarfield knows my views," said Carew, "and for that matter scarcely any one who goes to her bridge parties ever goes to church or anything of that sort. There is not a more godless set in London."

"Say it's superstition," said Webster, "but I suppose many such people well-nigh shuddered when they talked about your trampling on the cross and cursing the Founder of the Christian religion."

"But I did not do that—that is the latter thing."

"It amounts to pretty much the same thing, doesn't it?" said Wilton.

"But I say, be square now. What would you have done if you were in my place?"

"I would have played the game," said Webster. "Of course a lot of Lady Briarfield's set only spoke of your action as 'terribly bad form,' but to most people it was something more than that."

"But do you mean to say that if you had been situated as I was, you, who hold practically the same views as I do, would have, well—thrown away your life? For mind you, it meant that."

"I don't know what I should have done if I'd been in your place," said Webster; "but I know what I hope I would have done. I hope I should have told every lying evil-smelling Johnny among them that I'd see them to blazes before I'd do what they wanted."

"You'd have been in blazes yourself more likely."

"Then I'd be in blazes," said Webster. "Look here Carew, I don't profess to be a saint, and as for religion I've precious little of it; all the same, I tell you straight it was a caddish thing to do. Oh! I know you are no ordinary coward; it isn't that. But after all, the cross stands for all that's best in life. Your mother and my mother believed in it. It may be superstition. I don't know, but right

down at bottom it means the best we are capable of. It's well—kind of holy—I don't know how, but it is. I may be—well, what I am, but I'd have let the beggars do their worst before I'd have done what you did. And more, if I had saved my precious skin that way I'd never be able to respect myself again, and I shouldn't expect any one else to respect me."

"I say, are you a candidate for the Church?"

"No, I'm not, but I am an Englishman, and maybe I've a little more faith than I thought I had. Perhaps most of us have; anyhow, the whole thing leaves a nasty taste in one's mouth. There, you've asked me what I'd do, and I hope you're satisfied."

"What are you chaps doing to-night?" asked Carew, after a few minutes' silence.

"Nothing particular. Why?"

"If you've nothing on, come with me to one of the theatres."

"Awfully kind of you," replied Webster, "but I don't feel in the humour for that sort of thing."

A few minutes later they left him alone, and, if the truth must be told, in no very good humour.

Before the evening was over others of his friends dropped into the club. Carew did his best to be friendly, but somehow he felt that there was a kind of restraint. He saw one or two men lift their eyebrows as they saw him, while others nodded coolly and took their seats in a distant part of the room. He could not say that they "cut him," but no one seemed to desire his society.

The next morning he started for Cringfield Gardens in the hope of seeing Joan Winscombe.

## CHAPTER XI

### CAREW'S WELCOME IN LONDON

THE servant who met him at the door of Sir Richard Winscombe's house, told him that his master was not in town. He had gone down to the country on the previous day, and would not return until late that night or the following morning.

"Is Miss Winscombe at home?" asked Carew.

The man hesitated a moment. "I'll go and see, sir," he said, and bearing Carew's card with him he left the young man in the hall.

A few minutes later he returned. "Miss Winscombe bids me say, sir, that she's particularly engaged this morning."

Carew did not make any remark, but turned on his heel and walked away. The meaning was plain enough. Joan Winscombe did not wish to meet him, and had let him know it plainly. She had used no subterfuges. She had not allowed him to be dismissed with the polite fiction that she was "not at home." She had refused to see him, and his heart was very sore.

"This is a very warm welcome," he laughed bitterly. "The men at the club seem to avoid me, while the woman whose father I accompanied on a dangerous expedition, aye, and saved his life, refuses to see me. Well, what then? I'll drive her out of my mind."

But he did not drive her out of his mind. Moreover he knew that he would never be able to drive her out of his mind again. His love for her had come to him unbidden; but having come, it reigned in his heart, and in spite of the fact that he tried to drive Joan away from his thoughts, he could no more succeed than he could stop the Thames from flowing towards the sea.

"I'll go and see Bagrie," he said presently. "He'll be glad to see me. Besides, I'll take those articles to him. I arranged with him before I went away that he should have anything I cared to write, and, by Jove, I never dreamed that I should ever do anything so good. If I mistake not,

these sketches of mine'll make a sensation."

He found his way to the office of one of the great London dailies, and ere long was admitted into the editor's sanctum. Mr. Bagrie had just arrived, and was giving instructions about the next day's issue of his paper.

"Well, Carew, you look well," said the editor, when at length he was free for a chat.

"Yes, thanks; I feel very fit," said Carew.

"And you have had an interesting journey I imagine?"

"Oh, yes; it was a great lark. The greatest lark of my life. You heard all about it I imagine?"

"I have heard a good deal."

"Yes, but you heard about the fix Sir Richard and I were in? How we got to the old stones Sir Richard was after, and how we were tackled by a wild, howling set of Arabs?"

"Oh yes, I heard all about that," replied the other quietly. "It must have been very exciting."

"It was. 'Death or Conversion!' they yelled."

"And you got converted?"

"Oh yes. It was all the same to me you know. I wasn't going to throw away my life for a fad."

"Just so."

"But I tell you, Bagrie, the whole business has given me material for some rattling good copy. You've no idea how interesting everything became. I shall make a book of it."

"I should if I were you."

"Yes, I've got something that'll make a stir. It isn't often one has such experiences, and then comes out of them alive. Still, I've worked it all up in a series of articles."

"They should be jolly good."

"They are jolly good I tell you, although 'I ses it as shouldn't.' I never dreamed when I started that the thing would turn out so well. I've carted them along with me. You know we arranged that you should use them."

"Hem, yes."

"I suppose you'll get 'em in right away."

"Well, to be frank, we are very much pressed for space just now. You see Parliament is sitting, and there are several questions of great public interest being discussed."

Carew looked at the editor steadily.

"You don't want 'em?" he said interrogatively.

"Well, I'm afraid they'll not be in our line just now."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, I am in a bit of a fix. You know some nasty things were said about you at the time."

"But I—I say, old chap!"

"Exactly, but there it is. You see, I happened to be away for a few days when the news of your experiences reached the office, and my sub, who was running the paper, stuck in a great deal of stuff which I wouldn't have passed had I been at home. Some chap from Jerusalem, who sent the news, got hold of an Arab who gave a very graphic account of the proceedings. It seems that you trampled on the cross, and cursed the Christian religion."

"No, not so bad as that."

"Well, something of that sort. As I say, had I been home I shouldn't have inserted it; but you know what kind of a man McPhilkin is. He stuck it all in, and I can assure you it read well—strongly. Then, to make matters worse, a correspondence followed, in which it was urged that your action was unworthy of an English gentleman, even although faith were out of the question. You see, some Protestant fanatics tried to make a case out of it."

"But that's all forgotten by this?"

"My dear chap, people don't forget things so easily. You see, it was only a few weeks ago, and it caused quite a little excitement. Some of the papers had it on their posters—'An Englishman tramples on the cross at the bidding of Arabs,' or something of that sort. I didn't see it myself, as I told you. I was away from London. All the same it happened in the slack season, and the papers were hard up for news."

"And do you mean to say that you will refuse to print my articles because of this?"

"Well, you see, our paper is in the main owned by a very pronounced Christian. It is true he gives me a free hand on nearly every matter, but I know he would not like me to insert your articles."

"Why, man, can't you see that from an advertising standpoint the articles would do the paper a great deal of good. People would want to see what the chap who trampled on the cross had to say for himself."

"Hem, perhaps so; still, you see, the affair, owing to my absence, was made rather a special feature of in our paper,

and—well, our readers are in the main of Sir Richard's Winscombe's way of thinking. There's no accounting for taste you know. Of course, if you had adopted Sir Richard's attitude, and then had escaped, I'd have been jolly glad to have printed the articles; aye, and given you a big price for them, too. But as it is—well, I'm afraid I must deny myself the privilege."

"But, my dear fellow, no one of any note believes in Christianity now."

"No? I find it quite otherwise. You see your action in the business—well, it sounds ugly. It leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, too."

"Why, you'd have done the same thing yourself. Your views and mine tally almost exactly."

"Do they? Of course, I don't know, but there you are. As the matter stands I daren't print a series of articles by a man who—who—is regarded by the Christian public as a—well, call it what you like. Awfully sorry, old chap. Get them in some other paper. All editors may not be so cautious as I am; besides the shareholders of my paper—especially the chief shareholder—hold Sir Richard Winscombe's views."

Carew looked at Bagrie in astonishment. He had no idea that any objection would be raised on account of the incident in the wilderness. Especially did he regard Bagrie as one who regarded all religion as a thing of the past. Yet this man had refused his articles—not because he did not believe them to be good, but because he had renounced a religion in which he had no faith. It is true he had not renounced it in the ordinary way—that had been done years before. His sin seemed to lie in the fact that he had trampled on two sticks which had been placed in the form of a cross. Yes, there was something unpleasant about the thought. It was more than giving up faith, it was a positive insult to the faith of others. Logically there seemed no difference between his outward action and the attitude he had taken for years, but he knew there was a difference. The Cross stood for something very sacred to many millions of people, and he, to save his life, had crushed it beneath his heel. In spite of himself the thought made him uncomfortable, in spite of the fact that he had no faith in the dogmas which had been associated with the death of the Founder of the

Christian religion. Still, he did not mean to show any signs of repentance.

"Any one would think you believed in the business, Bagrie," he said.

"Would they? Well, belief is a very intangible affair, isn't it? Only the feelings which that action of yours aroused makes one think."

"Think what?"

"Oh, many things. After all, the purest and best emotions of one's life are associated with the Cross."

"A bit of maudlin superstition."

Bagrie was silent.

"Be honest now, Bagrie. Supposing you had been in my place, what would you have done?"

"I hope I should have adopted Sir Richard's attitude."

"What, chucked away your life for something in which you hadn't an atom of faith? For something the bottom of which you'd seen knocked out years ago?"

"There seems a fair amount of bottom in it yet."

"But my dear fellow!"

"Oh, yes, I know all you would say. Have you seen this article on old Father Whitman's mission? No? The people call him 'Father' because of his general attitude towards them. He's a sort of missionary to thieves and drunkards and prostitutes. Well, I sent down Flecky to write up his work. Flecky is an atheist, and as hard as nails; yet even he can't deny that scores of these poor devils, who were as foul as vermin, have been changed, after many years of debauchery, into sober, clean-living, God-fearing men and women."

"Pure froth."

Bagrie shrugged his shoulders.

"Then if you had been in my place, you'd have chucked away your life?"

"I'd have risked it."

"But show me the sense of such an action."

"Well, for one thing, I'd have acted like an English gentleman. At least, I hope I should. I would have told them and all their tribe to go to the infernal regions before I'd have knuckled down to them. That's first. My feelings as an English gentleman would I hope, have kept me from doing what you did. Then second, well it's difficult to put

into words, but it's just here. Call it superstition, call it sentiment if you like ; but leaving faith out of the question, the Cross stands for all that's—well, most sacred in one's life. It's, it's—but there, I can't put it into words, only such an action makes one feel the meaning of the word sacrilege."

"Whew!" was Carew's reply.

"Cheap humbug, isn't it, old man? But you asked me, and I've told you."

"But you don't believe in the business, Bagrie. You're a student, you are a reader of history, and you have the critical faculty developed."

"Believe! I don't know; but this I'm sure of, that business of yours feels all wrong. There, I am afraid you'll have to excuse me, old man."

When Carew left Bagrie's office he was puzzled. He thought but little of what the fellows he had met in the club the previous night had said; he had always regarded them as conventional chaps, whose opinions didn't amount to much. But Bagrie was different. He was an able man, he had read widely, and had uttered views which, to say the least of them, were rank heresy.

After he'd gone a few steps he turned back.

"I'll see what Bagrie's paper said about me," he said; and so returning to the office, he asked for the copies which would be likely to contain the required information. Then, remembering what had been said about old Father Whitman, he bought a current issue as well.

"I'll go back to the club and read them," he said, rolling the package under his arm.

He turned into Fleet Street and turned westward, but scarcely had he done so when St. Paul's clock began to strike. involuntarily he turned and looked up Ludgate Hill, and the one object which caught his eye was the golden cross lifted high in the heavens. In a moment he forgot where he was. In his mind's eye he saw not the cross lifted above the dome of the great cathedral, but two sticks placed upon the ground. Around him, instead of the busy life of Fleet Street was a crowd of wild-eyed, dark-skinned fanatical Arabs. Above the roar of the great city he heard them shrieking. He saw himself trampling the cross under his heel, and heard his own voice repeating the words of an old Sheikh, whereby he declared that he renounced the false symbol of a false faith.

But it was only for a moment. It seemed to flash before his eyes as a vision, and then he realized that he was in Fleet Street, and that he intended to go westward until he reached his club.

"Who'd have imagined that any one would have given a second thought to it?" he said.

When he reached his club, he found an empty chair and opened his papers. Presently he threw them down in disgust.

"Any one would think I'd committed some crime," he muttered. "Why, when one has made the most of it, I only—but there——"

He got up and looked round the room, but at the moment he could see no one whom he knew. He looked at his watch. It was too early to go anywhere. It was only half-past three in the afternoon.

He caught up the paper containing the article on old Father Whitman and, having found it, read it through.

"A downright good bit of journalism," he said. "Of course, the whole thing can be explained; all the same it is a very readable article, and will please pious people. I've no doubt it'll be quoted in scores of sermons next Sunday as a proof of the triumphs of Christianity. Meanwhile, Flecky will be drinking whisky and laughing at the whole business. What a farce it all is!"

He felt rather lonely. To say the least of it, his home-coming was not cheering. It seemed to him that everything had conspired to make the day miserable. First Joan Winscombe had refused to see him. Why? There could be no other reason than the affair about which he had been talking with Bagrie. Of course Joan was a religious girl. She was not of the Sunday bridge-playing "smart set" sort. He was glad of that. No decent fellow could respect such women, even although he might go to their Sunday bridge parties. Yes, he would a thousand times rather see her as she was than even to be like the best of the smart set. No doubt Joan was a pure-souled, high-minded woman, even although she was narrow in her religious notions. And she had refused to see him, him who knew that, without her, life would be bereft of its true meaning. Oh, yes, he would break down the barrier that lay between them. But how? He would see her, he would demand an interview as a right, and he would put the whole case to her as a thoughtful

intelligent woman, and then he would tell her that he loved her. He would plead his cause so fervently that she would forget her former dislike, and forget the incident about which people had been talking.

He wondered if she read the newspaper reports. He hoped not. The whole affair, as he had seen it in cold print, looked anything but pleasant. After all, there was something he did not like about it. He almost wished he had adopted Sir Richard's attitude, even although it meant the end of all things. But then, again, what would he do if he had to face the same situation again?"

"I'll go and see old Lady Binton," he said presently. "She's a delightful old pagan, and always cheerful. Besides, she generally has a lot of people calling on her of an afternoon."

He left the club, got into a cab, and drove further west; a few minutes later he was in the presence of a woman of sixty, who tried to appear at least half that age. All that beauty doctors could do for her had been done; all the youth that art, if the careful application of powder and soap and enamel can be called art, could bestow on her, had been bestowed. Her complexion was brilliant, her hair was of a glossy brown, her figure was perfect, nevertheless she looked just what she was, a worn-out, old woman over sixty years old.

"And so the wanderer has returned," said Lady Binton. "My dear boy, you have been quite a hero. All the papers have been full of you."

"Shows the good sense of the editors," laughed Carew.

"Yes, yes; but Bamfield, oh, you were naughty, naughty. And you brought up a good Papist, too. But there now, you are an interesting man. Come and sit down and tell me all about it."

"Oh, yes, do, urged one of the callers. "Do you know I almost shuddered as I read about it first of all. For, of course, the proper thing to do would be to strike a dramatic attitude and refuse to forsake the faith of your fathers, and all that sort of thing. But then, of course, you were not the kind of fellow who would act in that fashion. None of our way of thinking would. Now do tell us about it." This woman had been divorced a few months before.

"The newspapers have told a great deal more than I can tell you," said Carew.

"Oh, nonsense. We want to hear all about it first hand. Do you know that some people have been saying it was 'bad form,' but I was thinking it was delightfully wicked. Come now, we are all attention."

Carew looked at the people who had assembled at Lady Binton's tea-drinking. One or two he knew personally, the others he had heard of. They belonged to that class who sneered at "the morality of the middle classes." Taking a cup of tea in his hands he began to think how he might begin his story, but he did not speak. Truth to tell he felt somewhat ashamed of himself. Agnostic as he was, sneering at the "played out fallacy of religion," as he often had, he could not bring himself to tell what he had done to amuse a lot of women whom he despised. All they wanted was something to titillate their jaded palates, and they would discuss what he had done at their bridge parties that night. No, he could not tell them.

"I assure you there is nothing to tell, beyond what you saw in the newspapers," he said.

"But I have not read the newspapers, I hadn't the patience. I only heard that you had done something delightfully wicked, even although some people criticized you. Now, do tell us. Besides, we want to know about your life among the Arabs. I suppose they are awfully immoral, aren't they?"

"Yes, and we want to know about Sir Richard. I suppose Joan has declared she will never speak to you again; but then Joan, poor thing, spends most of her time in the slums."

Carew felt his anger rising as they continued to chatter. He was angry that these women should mention Joan's name, angry that the only people who condoned his action were the women whom he despised.

But he said nothing. In spite of many attempts to persuade him to tell what had taken place, he persistently tried to turn their attention to some other subject, until presently, bored and disgusted beyond expression, he rose to go.

"I suppose I ought to go home," he said as he left the house. "I shall get a warm reception from my father, but I must face it. Anyhow, I'd rather bear his pious laments than be in the foul atmosphere of those women."

A little later he stood at the door of his father's house.

## CHAPTER XII

### FATHER AND SON

THE father and son looked steadily at each other. It was now some months since they had met, and much had happened. Bamfield felt very uncomfortable as he looked into his father's eyes, but he did not flinch; whatever else the young man was, he was not a coward.

He was very fond of his father; he respected him very highly as an honourable, upright man. Moreover, he was his father, and he wanted, if possible, to be on good terms with him.

"Do you know," said Mr. Carew, senior, presently, "I would rather have heard of your death than have heard of what you have done?"

"And yet I thought you had a sneaking kindness for me," said Bamfield. "Years ago we were very good chums."

"That was when we were held together by holy bonds—bonds of love, respect and faith."

"Those bonds are as strong now as they were a year ago," replied Bamfield.

"Perhaps, perhaps, but——"

Mr. Carew sighed deeply and walked up and down the room.

"That was before the foul seeds of scepticism had brought forth their fruit," he said.

"I've lived a clean life, father," said Bamfield.

"But you've brought the curse of God on you. That is—tell me, are these stories true?"

"I should imagine so."

"You did what—what the papers said about you?"

"I say, father, try and look at the matter broadly. The whole business has lost meaning to me. I tell you I held on to it as long as ever I could. I tried to have some respect for Mussi's intellectual position but I couldn't. It's true Mussi upset all old Banyon's literalism. As you know, under Banyon I had to swallow the whole lot—Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, Jonah and the whale, Balaam's ass, miracles galore, and all the rest of it. Well, presently old Banyon

got into a funk, and you placed me under Mussi. Do you know Mussi's position? I should call him a symbolist. 'You are right,' he said, in effect, 'there is no historical basis for these things. Truth is not objective, it is subjective. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, Christ, they are only types, myths, ideas! Priesthood is an idea, popery is an idea, vicegerency is an idea—as old as the hills. The immaculate conception, that also is necessary to the whole thing. Remember what human nature is, and be content.' Well, don't you see? How could I square this with what popery actually claims to be. The thing is a farce, a sham!"

"You've mistaken Father Mussi; mistaken him utterly," said Mr. Carew.

Bamfield shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well. Say I have," he replied; "but here I was as I was. Christianity was, and is, nothing more to me than rattling of peas in a pan. It had no historical foundation. Why, think, father; I am sorry to hurt your feelings, but don't you see the great black lie of the sacrifice of the Mass? Fancy Mussi transforming bread and wine into——"

"Silence! I forbid you to say another word!" said Mr. Carew.

"Even a criminal is allowed to state his case," said Bamfield, shrugging his shoulders.

"But this is sacrilege, blasphemy!"

"The greatest sacrilege, the greatest blasphemy I know of is to pretend to believe in what every fibre of your being tells you is so much nonsense. Anyhow, here I was, placed between two alternatives—death, or to say I would renounce what I did not believe. Well, I wanted to live. I had some good articles in my mind, and I wanted to study Arab life. There now, that's the truth."

"If you'd been brought up a Protestant, I could have understood," said Mr. Carew; "but you were instructed in Catholic truth."

Bamfield smiled. "I know nothing about Protestantism," he said. "From all I understand it is an illogical and bastard Catholicism. I suppose the Church of England claims Apostolical succession, and all that it entails, while the Pope will have nothing to do with it. Well, it's all the same to me."

"But look here, my son," said Mr. Carew presently;

"don't you see you are breaking my heart?"

"Awfully sorry, dad."

"Then come back to the Church. Confess your errors and receive the Church's forgiveness."

"Dad, honestly, I would if I could; but if there is such a thing as sacrilege it would be greater sacrilege to me to do this than to do what you are so angry about."

"But why? Do you measure your wisdom against the voice of God? I tell you, it is for you to accept, to obey and leave these questions to those whom God hath appointed."

"Exactly; but to do this I should have to stultify my reason, I should have to say I believe what I know to be so much hocus-pocus."

"And yet you kissed the Koran?"

"Yes, and that's the one thing that I am a little ashamed of. But they knew I didn't believe. All those old chaps wanted was outward observance. Besides, I do accept a great deal of the fatalism of the Islamic faith."

"My son, are we to be ever kept asunder?"

"It will be your fault if we are."

"How can that be when you have spurned what is dearer to me than my life? I tell you I'd give all I possess—all, all!—to see you penitent, contrite, faithful. Come back to the Church and her sacraments, Bamfield. It's there you will find the heart of truth?"

"Even to please you I couldn't do that."

"But you don't pretend to be a Mohammedan?"

"I pretend to be nothing. I wanted to live, and I do live; and that's all about it. I say let religion go hang, and let me——"

"No, no. I have come of a long line of faithful men and women. Doubtless there have been wild, lawless fellows among the Carews, fellows who have outraged what we hold most dear; but never among my branch of the family has there been a man who has denied the faith. Bad they may have been; but they have always conformed, always confessed and gone to Mass. You are the first who has denied the truth of the Mass, the first who has trampled on the cross. No, no, Bamfield; I can't forget that you are your mother's child, but you never can be really a son of mine again until you confess your errors and come back to the Church."

"Good-night, father."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, to my club, I think. I shall sleep there for a few nights."

"Will nothing alter you, Bamfield? Have another talk with Father Mussi."

Bamfield shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I'll arrange for you to see the Cardinal."

"What! the man who excommunicated Mivart?"

"How could he do otherwise? And think, my son; you, you, if you do not repent, will be excommunicated."

"Well, what'll that matter? Whatever else the Protestants have done, they've cut the Church's claws. They can no longer torture or burn me. Do you know what Mivart did when the thunders of the Church were rattling about his head? He did what any sensible man would do—he laughed. I'm sorry our meeting has ended this way, dad, but I cannot help it."

For the next few days after this Carew was constantly meeting old acquaintances. In the main, there seemed to be a show of heartiness in their greetings, and yet he could not help feeling that there was something wanting. There was a lack of warmth, a lack of cordiality. When he walked into the smoking-room of his club he saw that the men nudged each other, as though he were a kind of pariah. And yet these men, in the main, were not of the religious order.

"It's all this infernal Arab business," he soliloquized.

"Who'd have thought that superstition was so deeply embedded in the hearts of sensible men? I could understand the women. Shallow and hollow as most of them are, I can understand them regarding me as a kind of Judas Iscariot; for women can't help being superstitious. But men, men who believe no more than I do—that's what I can't understand."

And more than that. He realized that those who pretended to make light of his deed were people for whom he had no respect. They were men whom he had avoided, and women concerning whom there was much scandal, women who boasted that they were above the morality of the middle classes.

Not that he was shunned or avoided. It was not that.

It was rather that a kind of invisible barrier was raised between him and the people whose respect he desired.

"I'll get out of it," he cried. "I'll go away somewhere, or else I'll take a flat, or go into chambers and write my book. That's it. I've got all my notes handy, and I'll go away down south, say to San Remo, or some such place. By that means I shall cheat the English winter, and write my book amidst pleasant circumstances."

But he did not carry his thought into effect. The truth was he did not want to get away from London, for he knew that in leaving London he would be leaving Joan Winscombe. It is true he had not seen her, although he had gone to various houses only because he hoped she might be there. He tried very hard to drive her from his mind, but in vain. The vision of her face was constantly rising before his eyes. He would have called at Sir Richard's house, but the memory of the message she had sent when he was last there forbade him. Leave London, however, he could not; the woman he loved was there, and although she might regard him with loathing, he stayed on in the hope of seeing her.

He took a small flat, and settled down to write his book. He determined he would not spare himself in any way. The book should be the means whereby, in spite of Joan's repugnance, he would compel her respect. She was a woman who paid homage to intellectual superiority, and when he was the talk of literary circles she would forget her prejudice against him.

He had barely planned the work he had in his mind before he found the necessity for consulting some rare books of reference. These, he felt sure, were in a library of which he was a member. Moreover, the secretary of the library was a scholar, and would be able to help him. Bentley, the secretary, and he had been at Oxford together.

"Sorry I can't let you have them for a few days," said Bentley, when he mentioned the books he wanted.

"Why?"

"Sir Richard Winscombe has them. I had him here for a couple of hours yesterday, and he ordered them to be sent to him."

"Sir Richard, eh?"

"Yes. Oh, I remember now. Of course you are on the same lines. I say, Carew, I should think you could help

the old man a great deal."

"How?"

"Why, you've got hold of the very things he'd give his head to get. He told me a good deal about his experiences down by the desert."

Carew looked rather angry.

"Oh, he said nothing about you," said Bentley, noting his look. "I tried hard to get him to, but he held his peace. All the same, he's just longing to get hold of the information you have obtained. That's why your book will be more valuable than his."

"How do you know what information I have obtained?"

"Of course I don't know exactly, but I know the hang of it. Bagrie told me. That was what Sir Richard was trying to get here yesterday, but I had to send him away disappointed. He had talked about going to some old library in Damascus, but I don't think he will, even though he told me he'd willingly give a thousand pounds to get hold of what he wanted, and what you possess."

"Did he seem anxious?" asked Carew almost eagerly.

"He did, indeed. I judge that his work will be like a bird with one wing through the lack of it. It's one of life's little ironies, isn't it? He went to Syria in order to get it, while you just accompanied him for fun. But it was you who reaped the reward. Not but what you paid for it dearly. I say, Carew, I've often thought of what you must have felt when you trampled that cross under your feet. It must have been a funny sensation, eh?"

"Why should it be?"

"Oh, I can hardly say; but you know what I mean. It stands for so much to millions of people, Protestants and Catholics alike. I almost felt like shuddering when I read about it in the papers, and I determined then that I'd ask you the first opportunity I got. It must have made you shiver, didn't it? Personally, I could not have done it."

But Carew left the library without giving any satisfaction to Bentley.

"Why are the fellows continually harping on that theme?" he said to himself as he strode away. "I never talk with any one now without being led to think of that blessed business. What is there in it that leads people to be for ever asking me questions about it? After all, what

are a couple of dry sticks?"

Nevertheless his visit to the library caused him to do what he would not have done otherwise. If Sir Richard was so anxious to get the information necessary to write his book, he, Carew, would be welcomed with open arms. Then, if Sir Richard received him, he felt sure he would presently be able to see Joan. And he must see her. He had not set eyes on her since he had realized his love for her, and his heart ached with pure longing. Yes, he would stifle his pride and go to Cringfield Gardens again; perhaps Sir Richard no longer regarded him as he regarded him out there in the wilderness.

He hailed a cab and drove straight to his flat, and after having carefully selected a number of papers he ordered the driver to go to Sir Richard's residence.

"It may have been that she was really engaged when I called before," he thought. "Her dressmaker might have been with her, or she might have had a lot of women who came about some charity she's connected with. Anyhow, I'll have another try to-day."

Dismissing the cab at Sir Richard's door, he rang the bell and waited with fast beating heart.

"Was Sir Richard home?"

The servant thought he was.

Carew gave the man his card, and a few seconds later was admitted into the house.

"I'll take you to the library, sir," said the servant. "Sir Richard's very busy at work there."

Carew looked around eagerly in the hope of seeing Joan, but she was nowhere visible, neither did he hear her voice. Indeed, the house seemed as silent as death.

"Ah, Carew," said Sir Richard as he entered, "I thought you might be calling again. I was sorry I was not at home when you came last."

"Thank you, Sir Richard," said the young man. "Ah, I see you are hard at work. I wonder if I know what you are working at."

"I expect you do," replied the Baronet.

"And you find it a tough job, I expect."

"Yes, you see——" and then Sir Richard became so interested in his book, and the difficulties he had to contend with, that for the time he seemed to forget the circumstances

under which they had parted.

"Bentley told me you had been to him, and had asked him to help you," said Carew presently.

"Yes, but even though, next to the British Museum Library, he has the best books in London, he can't get me what I want. I have spent hours over this catalogue all to no purpose, and he has ordered his men to dig and delve for me, but I can't get anywhere near what I want."

Carew felt that his opportunity had come. He possessed exactly what Sir Richard wanted, and he was perfectly willing to sacrifice any personal ambition which he possessed to be of service to the father of the woman he loved.

"I have been thinking of going to Damascus," went on Sir Richard. "I suppose there is a library there containing some valuable Arabic manuscripts, and it is quite possible that some of them will contain the story of the Tel Moloch Mosque. But, honestly, I don't like the idea of going East again. I expect my nerves are a bit upset. Besides I might get nothing for my pains. Very possibly, after spending months there, I should obtain nothing worth the having."

"There is no need for you to go to Damascus," said Carew. "Personally, I doubt very much whether a stay there would advantage you in the slightest degree, and, as you say, a visit there must be a great nuisance. Besides, you can get all you want in London."

"Do you mean to say that I can get what I want at the British Museum?"

"No, I don't. The story of Tel Moloch is not in the British Museum Library."

"Where is it, then?"

"Here," said Carew, tapping the roll of papers he had brought. "Look," he went on as he unfastened the wrapper, "here is practically all you need. This is a copy of some of the oldest MSS. in Arabia. I was very careful about them, and can vouch for their accuracy."

Sir Richard looked eagerly. Although he could not speak Arabic freely, he could read it easily. In his joy at finding what he wanted, he forgot the circumstances under which these papers were obtained. With all an antiquary's and a scholar's joy he began to devour the paper which Carew unfolded before him.

"Yes, yes!" he cried: "this is it, this is it!"

"And here," went on Carew, "are photographs of those stones. Not bad, eh? The light was not as good as one would have desired, but I have caught them fairly well. You see, I was able to gauge the exact amount of exposure which was necessary. The rubbings are not quite so good. Still, they are very interesting, and in their way quite valuable. I hope they will supply all you want."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Sir Richard, his eyes glistening with joy, "that I can make use of these?"

"You can have them," said Carew, delighted at his success. "As you know, my bent is not antiquarian like yours. I look at them from the standpoint of a modern journalist, not as one who has seriously studied archaeology,"

"Why, this is priceless in its value!" exclaimed Sir Richard, "simply priceless! These are simply worth their weight in gold a thousand times over."

"I am glad you think so," replied Carew. "Here, again, are notes of the legendary history of the mosque. Of course, I daresay many of these legends are far more modern than many of them believe, nevertheless they are of considerable interest."

"Interest! Interest! I should think they are!" and the Baronet began to read feverishly. Evidently he well-nigh forgot Carew's presence. His eyes were riveted on the paper, and his hands trembled as he turned the leaves.

"Marvellous, marvellous!" he cried. "What would Sayce give to get hold of this! And you say I can make use of it all, Carew?"

"Everything here is yours to do what you like with," replied Carew. "Moreover, I think I can be of some help to you. The Nazir told me many things while I stayed at Tel Moloch which throw a wonderful light upon the Islamic conception of things. After the old chap got accustomed to my presence we became quite friendly. In his own way he is quite a learned man."

Up to now Sir Richard's feverish joy at finding what he desired had blinded him to everything else. He had forgotten all about their parting at Tel Moloch, forgotten what he had said, but when Carew began to speak about the Nazir he started up like a man who had been awakened out of a dream.

"The Nazir! The Nazir!" he said.

"Yes, the Nazir. Don't you remember? The man who acts as instructor on religious matters. Really, he is a wonderful old man. I believe he knows the Koran by heart, while he treasures every legend, every wild story about the mosque as though——"

Sir Richard was not listening. He had left the table where Carew had spread his papers, and had walked towards the fireplace.

"I had forgotten, I had forgotten!" he said aloud. "In my eagerness I did not remember. Thank you very kindly, Carew, but—but, I cannot take advantage of what you have brought."

"But why?"

"You know why, Carew, you know why."

"But surely—I say, Sir Richard, don't you think this is a little Quixotic? Here is the very information you need. Here, also, are the photographs and the rubbings of the stones you went to Syria to obtain. Why——"

"Yes, I know, and I thank you very much; but I had forgotten. No, thank you, I cannot use this—that is, what you have brought me."

Carew was about to reply, but before the words passed his lips the door opened, and Joan Winscombe entered.

"I hope you are not busy, father," she said, "but I wanted to——"

At this moment she caught sight of Carew, and then her words died upon her lips. Evidently she had no idea that he was in the house, and had rushed into the room on the impulse of the moment.

"Ah, Miss Winscombe," said Carew, holding out his hand, "I am glad to see you. We have not met since we were in Jerusalem together. You've just come in time, too. Won't you help me to persuade your father against being foolish?"

But Joan did not speak, neither did she notice his outstretched hand.

"Pray forgive me, father," she said, after a few seconds of awkward silence. "I had no idea any one was here."

She turned to leave, but her father's voice arrested her footsteps.

"Stay, Joan," he said; "I want you to hear what Mr. Carew has just told me."

## CHAPTER XIII

### JOAN WINSCOMBE AND CAREW

JOAN WINSCOMBE came close to her father's side. By this time she had collected her thoughts and had evidently realized that she had been anything but courteous to Carew.

"Forgive my surprise on seeing you," she said, turning to him; "but I had no idea you were in the house. Are you very well?"

"Perfectly well, thank you." He was not sure what her more friendly attitude meant; but he determined to make the most of it. "Miss Winscombe, won't you join your persuasions to mine? I find that your father is greatly hindered in his work for want of certain information which I am able to give him. You know why he took his journey to the East, and you know, too, that the real value of his book will largely depend upon the reproduction of those 'Stones of Moab,' and an authentic history of the events which led to their being placed in the mosque at Tel Moloch. I have placed much valuable information before him, with an exact facsimile of the stones themselves, which for his purpose is just as good as if he had the very stones in this room. He tells me he will neither use the information nor the photographs of the stones. Won't you join with me in trying to persuade him to alter his decision?"

"Might I ask how you obtained these things?" she asked.

"I obtained them at Tel Moloch," he replied. "I obtained permission from the Nazir, who had received powers from the Sheikh ul Islam himself."

"That was after my father was rescued?"

"Exactly," replied Carew. He spoke confidently, but the look in the girl's eyes made him feel uncomfortable.

"I am glad my father refused to take advantage of your offer," replied Joan; "as you can see, he could do no other."

"But why?"

"Because my father could not make use of what you obtained by such means."

But for his love for Joan, Carew would have walked out of the house never to return again, but as she stood by her

father's side it seemed to him that his love had grown ten times stronger. He felt, too, that he might never have such another opportunity of removing her prejudices against him. If he did not attempt to justify himself now, it seemed to him that his chance of doing so would be gone for ever.

"But—but Miss Winscombe," he cried eagerly, "please forgive me for speaking in this way, but what I did I did for your father's sake as much as my own. But for my—well, call it what you like, neither of us would be alive to-day—and I—I knew you loved your father very dearly."

Joan never realized so fully as at that moment the truth which Carew's words conveyed. What he had said was doubtless a fact. Had not Carew appeased the mad fury of the fanatical Arabs, her father would have been murdered, and instead of standing by her side alive and well, his body would have been lying in some nameless Arab grave, while she would have been left alone to mourn his loss. Such a thought could not help having its effect. Moreover, as he stood there, he did not suggest anything very monstrous. Indeed, Carew was not a man who would ever be passed by unnoticed. Tall and well formed, he dwarfed most men with whom she was acquainted by his splendid physique. Neither was his face the face of a bad man. Rather it suggested strength and honesty and refinement. All this affected her, while the fact of his coming to offer her father the manuscripts and photographs which he so much desired added to the impression he had made.

"I hope I am quite sensible of what you did, Mr. Carew," she said. "As you say, your action very probably saved my father's life, and—and it may be I have not recognised that fact as I ought to have recognised it. If that is so, I must ask you to forgive me. But what you ask means very much more. My father could not help accepting his safety. He could not kill himself because you had secured a respite for him. All the same, he could not deliberately make use of what you offer. Whether they would have killed him or not, I do not know—we never shall know. But I know this; you could never have been able to have made him the offer you have just made had you not——"

She did not finish the sentence, but Carew saw her shudder as if with horror and loathing.

"But if it meant nothing to me?" he said.

"It means a great deal to us," she replied. "I feel as my father feels. He could never make use of what was obtained by outraging what we hold most dear."

Carew felt that the ground was slipping under his feet. Yes, the deed was a ghastly one, and he never realized it to such a degree as he realized it that day in Joan Winscombe's presence. Nevertheless, he was not going to give up easily. She believed that he had saved her father's life by what he had done: or, if she did not believe it, she admitted the possibility of such being the case.

"Would you rather, then," he said, looking straight into her face, "that your father had been murdered than that I should have done what I did?"

Joan's eyes drooped for a moment, then she lifted them quickly to his, and Carew could not help noting the angry gleam which shot from them.

"It is not a fair question," she said. "You know that I love my father very dearly, and that the thought of his death is more terrible to me than words can express. But I will answer you in this way. I would rather die myself—yes, a hundred times rather, than that my life should be saved by such a means. After all, it would be only a question of a few years more or less of earthly existence. And death—well, it is only the beginning of life."

"But if one does not feel that, nor believe it!" cried Carew. "To me this life is all. There is nothing else. If I had given up my life, I should have given up my all, for that which means nothing to me."

"Means nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Do you mean that the Cross of Christ means nothing?" She repeated the words slowly.

"What can it mean?" he asked almost sullenly.

"If it means nothing else," she said, "it means that the bravest, holiest man who ever lived died for what he believed to be the truth. That in itself should be enough to make it sacred."

The words struck him with a strange meaning. Some words of an American atheist lecturer came to his mind—"The place where one man died for another is holy ground."

And it was true. Even if the whole fabric of Christianity was false, the cross represented a fine idea; it lay at the heart of a great truth. And he had trampled on it.

Perhaps the look on his face made the girl feel kindly towards him.

"Doubtless you feel that we are making a great fuss about a very little," she said. "You feel that death would be the end of all things, while we believe it is only the beginning. To you the cross which the Arabs placed on the ground was only two sticks; to us, on the other hand, it stands for all that is holiest and most sacred. Therefore we have no right to judge you. We have no common ground whereon we can stand. All the same, I am sure you can see how impossible it is for me to try and persuade my father to take advantage of your offer. After all, what is a book? The truth will live even although we do not add our quota to its proclamation."

The poles lay between them, and he knew it. Yet he loved her. What in another he would have sneered at as ignorant superstition and stupid bigotry seemed something noble as represented by her. He could not help comparing her with those Sunday bridge-playing women who made light of his action and regarded it as delightfully daring, and he could not help realizing how infinitely superior she was. They were shallow, worldly—aye, and coarse. Some of them were immoral. They lived in a world which was different from that in which she lived.

"I am very sorry I can be of no service to you, Sir Richard," he said slowly. "I had quite hoped I might have got you out of a difficulty."

"Pray do not think I fail to appreciate your kindness," replied Sir Richard. "I hope I do appreciate it fully. Moreover, I have often thought since we last parted that I was very rude and churlish to you when—when we were at Tel Moloch. I hope I am not wanting in gratitude, even although I am not able to take advantage of your offer. Of course," went on the Baronet, after hesitating a second "you will yourself make use of your possessions. They are very valuable, and go far to prove that for which I have contended for years."

"I—I had thought of working it up into a book," admitted Carew.

"And it should be a very valuable book," added Sir Richard. "By the way, Carew, do not make yourself a stranger to the house. As you know, neither I nor Joan go into society much, neither do we throw our house open like—some do. All the same, I shall be glad to see you when you have time to call."

Carew glanced towards Joan as if he expected her to second her father's invitation; but she did not speak a word.

Bamfield Carew was very thoughtful when presently he found himself again in the street. The interview had been a revelation to him. In a way, he had expected no other result from their meeting, and yet things appeared to him in a new light. He had never so fully realized what the faith of these people meant. Sir Richard had refused to buy his life at the cost of performing what was to him a meaningless action, while they were in Syria. And now in London he would not even avail himself of what he confessed to be valuable material, because it had been obtained by means which the Baronet disapproved of.

"Don Quixote and Sancho Panza were sane and unromantic compared with them!" he muttered impatiently.

Nevertheless he was not comfortable himself. At any rate, their faith meant good lives. Again he saw Joan as she stood by her father's side, and again he could not help contrasting her with the women who made light of what he had done.

"Yes, I suppose from their standpoint it was a blasphemous thing to do," he said to himself as he made his way towards Oxford Street. "Evidently the old superstitions are not dead, and the Christ-myth is still believed in, even by educated people."

At that moment he passed a book shop. "I wonder if there is anything new," he said as he stopped before the window. He gazed along the lines of books, but nothing attracted him.

He went inside and began to examine the volumes on the shelves.

"Anything I can show you, sir?" asked the bookseller's assistant deferentially.

"No, thank you. I am only looking around in the hope of seeing something I want to read."

His eyes travelled from shelf to shelf. No, he could see

nothing which interested him.

"The autumn output is not very attractive this year," he remarked to the young man, who had followed him with his eyes.

"No, sir; there is nothing particularly outstanding. Still, there are several books of considerable interest."

Carew looked at the young man attentively. Yes, he was evidently an intelligent fellow. Probably he belonged to the old order of booksellers who had some intelligent interest in the books they sold.

"Is there any particular line of books in which you are interested?" asked the young man.

"Ye—es," replied Bamfield slowly. "Have you any book bearing on the religious question of to-day? Books dealing with the agnostic attitude of mind?"

"Yes, sir, certainly," and the young man named several scholarly volumes.

Bamfield shook his head. The volumes did not attract him.

"Look here," he said, "you seem a well-informed young fellow. Are you one of the churchgoing order?"

"Yes, sir, I go to church."

"Do you go just as a matter of form, or has it any meaning to you?"

"I am a Sunday-school teacher," said the young man, looking towards his questioner curiously.

"And what do you teach?"

"The truths of the New Testament."

"Ah, that's your text-book, eh?"

"Yes, that's the text-book."

"You'd call it the fountain-head, eh?"

"Yes and no."

"Wherein is the yes, and wherein is the no?"

"The 'yes' lies in the fact that the New Testament is the record of the life and death of Jesus Christ. The 'no' is in the truth that not a book, but a Person, is the fountain-head of Christianity."

Bamfield Carew looked at the young man intently. He seemed about twenty-five years of age, his eye was lit up with a bright, cheery light, and he smiled pleasantly as he spoke. He had dropped in at a moment when the shop was empty. That was why he had been able to speak so freely.

"Bring me a copy of the New Testament, will you?"

"Certainly."

A minute later several copies were placed before him.

"I'll buy one of these," said Bamfield.

"Which version, sir—the Revised or the Authorised?"

"The Authorised."

He paid his money and left the shop.

"Good," he said; "I scarcely know anything about the New Testament. Old Banyon used to read me bits out of the Douay Version, and interpreted what he read to suit the doctrines of the Church, while Mussi told me to leave it alone. As for the rest of the attention I have given to it, I——"

He laughed as he walked along the street. "I wonder what Rechlin and Beaumont and Aberfoyle would have said if they saw me buying a New Testament?" he said to himself.

He mapped out his programme for the night. He would go to his flat and dress, after which he would go somewhere for dinner, and then—well, he remembered several cards that lay on his table bearing invitations to various functions. Then there were the theatres. But first of all he would dress and get some dinner.

After having dressed he did not feel inclined to go out. Neither of his clubs attracted him, while as for going to one of the fashionable hotels, he rather shrank from it. There was a restaurant in the flat where he could get some dinner, after which he would make up his mind what to do.

After dinner he went out alone. He was feeling very lonely, and yet he was not anxious for the society of others. A few minutes later he passed a theatre which was all ablaze with lights, and at the doors of which crowds surged.

He looked at the play-bill and went in. The piece was a musical comedy, and had been spoken of as the most mirth-provoking thing on the London stage. He had but little difficulty in obtaining a stall, and he had scarcely seated himself when the curtain was raised.

At the end of the second act Bamfield Carew came away. The tawdry show did not amuse him.

He hesitated where to go next, but presently found himself sitting in his own room.

"I'll do some work," he said; "the evening is early yet, and I can put in three or four hours."

He took off his evening coat and put on an old velvet jacket ; then, having lit his pipe, he began to look around for some books he desired. In so doing his eye fell upon the New Testament he had bought that evening.

He threw himself in his armchair, and, having switched on the electric light just above his head, began to read. At first he was but little interested. The long list of names given in the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel had to him neither purpose nor meaning. But presently his attention became riveted. He found himself reading what was to him a new book. Besides, he could not help being impressed with the narrative. If only from the standpoint of literature it was very fine. There was a stately dignity, a fine sense of reserve, and such a majesty of conception in every page that he read on like a man entranced.

"This is very fine," he said aloud presently, and yet he did not know he had spoken.

His reading became a revelation to him. This was like no other book with which he was acquainted. Of course, it was a literature born in a dark age, but it was very wonderful. Reared as he had been in a Roman Catholic home, and under Roman Catholic influences, the New Testament was almost strange to him. He was no longer hampered by Church legends or Church teaching. He read the book as literature, and as a very interesting record of a remarkable man. Of course, the narrative was coloured by the superstitions of the time ; of course, too, there were interpolations and mistakes, but it was very fine.

As he read on, the character of Jesus began to take shape before his mental vision. It was altogether unlike the Being in which he had been taught to believe as a boy. He saw no halo around His head, neither was His face distorted by an artificial agony, such as he had seen in statues and pictures. It was something nobler, grander than the legendary Christ. Here was dignity, courage, strength ; here, too, was a Man in whose mind revolved mighty schemes, and whose heart was filled with a great compassion for humanity. All the heroes of romance were but as dolls by the side of this sublime figure.

A knock came to the door and a servant entered.

"A gentleman has been asking for you on the telephone, sir."

"Who is it? What does he want?"

"A Father Mussi, sir, is asking if you are at home."

Carew looked at his watch; it was just five minutes to ten.

"Tell him I can see him at eleven o'clock," he said,

"Yes, sir."

And then Carew turned eagerly to his reading again.

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN WHICH CAREW SEES HIS ACTION IN A NEW LIGHT

"I KNOW nothing like it," exclaimed Carew presently. "It may not be history, but the man who wrote this knew his work. It seems like truth, too. There is no attempt to soften hard sayings, no endeavour to qualify or explain anything. It is fine, there can be no question about it. The man Jesus was a mystic, a seer; but He was more. He was a giant intellectually, and He was unhampered by tradition, by custom, and by current orthodoxy. Yes, He was just the man to found a great and universal religion. If this story was invented—well, I should like to know who invented it. The man who created the character of Jesus must have been a transcendent genius. There is nothing like it in literature."

Still he read on, until presently he came to the story of the crucifixion. He discarded all the miraculous elements of the story. Materialist as he was, they had no meaning to him. What attracted him was the sublimity of the central figure in this great tragedy. He pictured Him with His disciples at the last supper, he saw Him go into the Garden of Gethsemane afterwards. When Carew had been in Jerusalem a few months before, he had gone to this garden, or at least to the place which, legend had it, was identical with Gethsemane, but he had paid no heed. His mind had been distracted by the conventional stations of the cross. The carved figures representing Christ at the various stations were all a part of the artificial show which he had discarded years before. But all was different here in the story. There was nothing unreal, nothing tawdry in the scene as described by Matthew. Whether it were true, or whether it were a fable, it was all fine and dignified. He seemed to see the real agony of Christ, not the play-acting agony which had become meaningless to him, but that mighty struggle going on in the breast of a Man who faced the ghastly future which faced Him. Indeed, he realized something of the inwardness of the whole story, he saw that the agony of Christ was not a fear of death, but the drinking of the cup

that was filled with the world's sin and sorrow. And this came to him as an impression rather than as a distinct thought. For he had ceased to analyse and criticize. The majesty of the scene had gripped him, the sublime grandeur of the central figure enthralled him.

He read on and on. The story of the betrayal by Judas, the account of the trial before the orthodox Jews, the denial of Peter, the remorse of Judas, the judgment of Pilate—and as he read he saw. He was no longer in a modern flat in a fashionable part of London. He knew nothing of the life of the six millions of people who surged around him. The only real thing in the world to him was this tragedy which he was reading. He was at Jerusalem, and he was watching.

*"Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the Governor took Jesus into the Common Hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe.*

*"And when they had platted a crown of thorns they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand, and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And after they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him. . . . And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say a place of a skull, they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall; and when he had tasted thereof He would not drink. And they crucified Him. . . . And sitting down they watched Him there, and set up over His head His accusation written: 'THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.'"*

It was all real to him. He could see the faces of the howling mob, he could plainly discern the malignant smile on the faces of the bigoted priests and Pharisees who watched Christ die; but more than all he saw Jesus hanging on the cross above which this accusation was written. It was like a scene at a theatre, only it was more real. The thing he saw was life, and death, not semblances.

Then, even as he saw, the scene changed. Again it was an eastern scene, and again the mob was an infuriated mob. He saw an Arab Sheikh place two sticks on the ground in the

form of a cross. He did so with a look of hatred in his eyes. "Now, my dear," said the old man, "if you will save your life, trample on this cross, symbol of a false faith." He heard the voice of Sir Richard Winscombe who was protesting vehemently, he heard the savage voices of the Arabs, and he saw the look of wild fanaticism in their eyes. Then he saw himself step into the circle, and with a mocking laugh, trample the symbol under his feet.

No, it was not a chivalrous thing to do, it was—yes, he admitted it to himself—it was dastardly, it was contemptible. He did not believe in the story of Jesus, as interpreted by the Church in which he had been reared, but no one could read what he had read that night without admitting that Jesus stood for the noblest and best in life. He scorned all that was mean, and poor, and paltry. He saw deep into the heart of life. He had a great charity. His thoughts were sublime. To say the least of it, His death was the death of a hero. Even if He were mistaken, the mistake was majestic, it was God-like. And he, at the bidding of those ignorant, murderous Arabs, had mocked that noble death, he had trampled on the cross which was the symbol of holy ideals and of a sublime purpose.

A knock came to the door, and a second later Father Mussi entered the room.

"Ah, Bamfield, I find you at home, do I? Good. I wanted a chat with you."

Carew started to his feet. For a moment he was dazed, but Mussi's presence brought him back to realities. While he had been sitting there he had forgotten that the priest was going to call, but now he remembered the message he had given to the porter.

"Ah! Father Mussi," he said, "take a seat, will you? You will take some refreshments, eh?"

"Only a whisky and soda, thank you, Bamfield. I dined late to-night, since which I have been to see your father."

Bamfield placed the New Testament on one of the shelves, and then took a bottle of whisky and a siphon of soda-water from a cupboard.

"Well, what have you been doing to-night?" asked the priest presently.

"Oh! I went to the *Siren* for an hour, but I did not stay."

"No? Was it poor?"

"It was insufferably dull and unspeakably silly. I stood it as long as I could and then came away."

Again a silence fell between the two men. Each looked steadily into the fire. In Mussi's eyes there was a look of doubt and indecision; in Carew's there was an expression of wonder and of far-away memories.

"Bamfield," said the priest presently, "your father is a very unhappy man."

"I am sorry for that."

"Only you can remove his unhappiness."

"I would do anything in my power to make him happy," replied the young man quietly. Evidently he had a strong affection for Mr. Carew, senior.

"It is in your power."

"Then you may regard it as done. What is it?"

"It is this religious question."

Silence.

"You know how your father feels," went on the priest. "To him the Catholic faith is as dear as his own life. He would do anything, give anything, to see you back in the fold again."

"I know he would."

"Then we may regard the matter as settled?"

Bamfield shook his head. "Impossible," he said.

"Why impossible?"

"I could not, Mussi; I could not, even for dad's sake."

"But, my dear fellow," said the Italian, "if in order to save your life you pretended to accept the Mohammedan faith, you can surely return to the fold to please your father. Eh, what is that?"

The latter expression sprang to the priest's lips almost involuntarily. He saw by the look on Carew's face that he had made a mistake. An expression of impatience, almost amounting to passion, flashed from his eyes, and he sprang to his feet as though he were stung.

"Don't for heaven's sake be eternally harping on that," he cried angrily. Then he laughed uneasily as he again sat down.

"But look here, Bamfield, my lad; consider the whole question from a broad standpoint."

"Broad standpoint!" cried Carew. "I think I've done that. Look here, up to to-night the one thing that worried

me in the whole of that fiasco at Tel Moloch was not that I had trampled on what you call a sacred symbol, but that I had kissed the Koran. I was not troubled so much about trampling on something which I did not believe, but for pretending to believe in something that was hocus-pocus. I tried to console myself by the thought that the heart of Islamism was a kind of fatalism, a belief that the secret of life lay in submission to an eternal force, and that I had a sneaking kindness for that kind of philosophy. But it won't do, I was dishonest; they believed I was a convert, whereas I was laughing at the whole thing all the time. Well, I'm not going to repeat the fiasco."

"But, my dear boy, look at the whole matter in the light of my interpretation, and then tell me what you don't believe."

"Well, to begin with, Mussi, either you as a priest have supernatural powers or you haven't. A good Catholic is supposed to believe that you have. I don't. And more, the position of you liberal Catholics is not honest. There can be no such thing as liberal Catholicism. It is playing with facts. The Catholic position is an unreserved acceptance of her claims and her dogmas. Well, I don't accept them. To me they are a mere fandango of absurdities."

"Sweeping."

"Just so. But I take it you came here to have a straight talk with me. I am neither a candidate for the priesthood, nor am I seeking favour at the hands of the Jesuit Order. You want the truth, I take it, and I have told you the truth."

"As it is in Bamfield Carew."

"And that's the best truth that Bamfield Carew is capable of."

"But, my dear boy, to begin with, humanity will have a religion of some sort. The history of the races has proved that. Well, tell me a higher, a better religion than the Christian."

"The Christian," repeated Carew significantly.

"Why, do you mean to insinuate that the Catholic Church is not Christian?"

Carew was silent.

"Come now, Bamfield, as we have gone so far, let's go a little further."

Father Mussi looked attentively at the young man's face

and wondered what he was thinking.

"I've just read the Gospel as it was written, or supposed to be written, by a man called Matthew," said Carew presently.

Mussi opened his eyes wide. He realized that they had entered a new field of thought.

"Well, and what do you think of it?" he said presently.

"Fine, wonderfully fine!" replied Carew.

"Well, that Gospel is the property of the Church. It was preserved by the Church."

"Was it?"

"Yes, of course; that is a commonplace."

"And the Church holds fast by it?"

"Certainly, in every particular."

Carew was silent again.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because there seems to me precious little similarity between that simple, sublime story and—and—well, all I was taught to believe as a boy."

"But, my dear fellow, just think of the whole case."

"My dear fellow, I have thought of the whole case a hundred times, and it is no use arguing. I don't believe, and there's an end of it. Mark you, there is something wonderful in the life of Jesus. It's the profoundest thing I have ever read. And yet its simplicity is marvellous. I'll go further. If the story were stripped of the miraculous elements it would be believable. But even as it stands it has very little resemblance to, neither does it give any authority for, your Catholic dogmas. The seven sacraments, the claims of the priests, the Papal chair, the Mass, confession and absolution, the worship of the saints and the mother of Jesus, and all the rest of it—why, you know, Mussi, that they are not found there."

"Well, what do you deduce from it?"

"I? Oh! nothing at all."

"Because the Anglican Church is fast returning to our position, while the dissenting sects are—well, a confusion of tongues."

"Exactly."

"Then you are not bitten by what is called Protestantism?"

"Never gave it a thought, my dear fellow. I suppose,

though, that Protestants do claim the right of private judgment."

"And a pretty mess they've got into!"

"Exactly. Well, I've given up the whole show. I don't believe, Mussi. I can't believe. I know the Church demands belief. I know the Catholic Church says, if we don't believe in all those dogmas which she has built up on the story of the life of Jesus, that we shall be damned everlastingly. Just so. But if I am to be damned for not believing—well, I must be damned, for I simply can't believe and there's an end of it."

Carew's cigar had gone out, and taking a taper from the mantelpiece he lit it again.

"Then we've come to a *cul de sac*."

"We've come to a *non possumus*, Mussi. Excuse me for treating you with such familiarity, but you can see why. Your calling is nothing to me."

Mussi did not speak; instead he looked furtively at Carew's face, as though he tried to discover some thought at the background of his mind; but evidently he was disappointed. Carew was a hopeless case. He could not be induced to adopt the attitude of the liberal Catholics. His difficulties were fundamental.

Presently the priest rose. "If I can ever be of service to you, Bamfield, you'll let me know? I was hoping that you would be able, for your father's sake, to adopt the Catholic attitude. Many have done it with less faith than you. A man votes for a political party without believing in everything that party does; and if you could—well, you know what I mean, I believe you would add years to your father's life."

Carew's face softened. Yes, he would like to please his father, and of course many who professed to be liberal Catholics were very broad in their interpretation of the Church's doctrines. Then he thought of the life of the Man whose story he had been reading that night.

"No, Mussi, I couldn't do it."

A few seconds later the priest was in the street, while Carew sat alone in his room, staring steadily into the fire.

"Why does that business haunt me so?" he said, at length.

"As I told Mussi, I don't believe, and yet——"

He went to the bookshelf where he had placed the volume

he had been reading, and again he began to scan its pages. His mind was preternaturally active, and although it was past midnight, he knew he could not sleep even if he went to bed. The silence of night was at last beginning to reign over the great modern Babylon. The vehicles in the streets were less numerous, the roar of the city was less pronounced.

He threw more wood on the fire, and then, having adjusted the light, he again began to read. This time he turned to John's Gospel.

Again the picture of that scene on Golgotha became vivid before his eyes, and again that other scene at Tel Moloch came back to him, and with it a feeling which he could not understand.

"I'm getting morbid," he said. "I'll try and get a sleep. I'll have a hot bath, that'll help me."

For the next few days Bamfield Carew worked at his book, and then, finding that he needed the advice and assistance of a learned Rabbi who lived in the East End of London, he made his way thither. He found the Rabbi to be a man not only of culture, but of great social qualities. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and a musician of no mean order.

"I wonder you can spend your life down here in this quarter," remarked Carew, when, after dealing with the questions concerning which he had come, they sat in the Jew's study.

"The claims of race are very strong," remarked the Rabbi.

"You mean that you desire to help your countrymen?"

"Are they not mainly poor in this part of London?" he replied. "Many of them are refugees from Russia and Poland. They work under terrible conditions, and one is glad to try and bring some brightness into their lives."

"And do these co-religionists of yours really hold fast to their religion?"

The Rabbi shook his head. "The surroundings of their lives are very terrible," he said.

"Yes, of course, that must be so," said Carew; "but do you ever change these men's lives? That is, you have drunkards and thieves among your people as other people have; do you ever save them from their drunkenness and their thieving proclivities?"

The Jew shook his head. "One's great hope is with the

children," he replied. "After all, the great work is social work, educational work."

"But, tell me now, do you think there is any real salvation for the outcast and the degraded in the East End? Can the drunkard be made sober? Can the harlot be made pure?"

"All I can say is, I have not succeeded," replied the Rabbi. "Of course, we teach the people what is right, and we try to better their conditions; but my own experience is that when either a man or woman gets adrift in this maelstrom of the East End of London that man or woman sinks deeper and deeper."

"It's a weary picture," remarked Carew.

"I am afraid it is true. Of course, I work only among my own people. We do not proselytize; we could not. We have our faith, and we hold fast by it."

"Then yours is a racial religion?"

"In a sense, yes. But in another sense it is the only universal religion. Has not the Jewish Bible laid the foundations for the ethics of the civilized world?"

When Carew left the Jew's house it was very late, so late that he found the streets empty, and he looked in vain for a cab to take him to the nearest station.

"It's a curious neighbourhood to be in at this time of night," thought the young man, "the sooner I get out of it the better I shall be pleased."

He might have been in a Jewish city. Everywhere were evidences of the Jews' precincts. The signboards on the shops, the notices in the windows, were all written in a language which he could not understand.

"I hardly know where I am," mused the young man. "Coming as I did in a cab, I took no notice of the names of the streets. I wish I had told the fellow to wait for me."

This thought had scarcely passed through his mind when he heard a cry of distress. As far as he could judge moreover, it was the cry of a woman.

"Yes, I am doubtless in a strange part of London," reflected Carew. "No police are around, and any devilry might happen here and no one be the wiser."

He tried to take his bearings. After all, there would be no danger for him. He could be only a mile or so from Fenchurch Street, and once on his way there he could reach his flat in less than half an hour.

Again the cry of distress reached his ears, a cry that was immediately stifled. Moreover, it was not far away.

"I suppose it is some drunken woman," thought Carew; "all the same it does not sound like drunken orgies usually do."

"Help, help!"

"I'll go and see what it means at all events," thought the young man, and he made his way towards the direction whence the sound came.

After all, it was only the common happening of a low part of the city. Two men were trying to drag along a woman who was evidently the worse for drink. The poor creature had reached that stage of intoxication which rendered her most unreasonable, while the men, who were nearly as drunk as she, were trying to force her to go to her miserable lodgings. Besides, others had evidently heard the woman's cry, for Carew noticed that from another direction a man and woman were hastening towards them.

"I can do no good," he thought, "and the sooner I can get out of this the better."

But he did not go away. Something in the voices of the newcomers arrested him. It was evident that they belonged to an order quite different from those whose quarrel had brought him thither.

He took a step nearer towards them, and then came to a full stop, for in the light of the street lamp he saw the face of Joan Winscombe.

"Surely I am not dreaming, Miss Winscombe?" he said, as he came to her side.

She looked at him wonderingly, and then the light of recognition came into her eyes.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Carew," she said. "I'm so glad. You'll be able to help us, I am sure."

## CHAPTER XV

“HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN ME?”

“We don’t mean no awm, we don’t. She’s only drunk, thet’s orl. We’re only a-takin’ ’er ’ome. Af we don’t, she’ll git in the ’ands of the cops, and werry likely be sent to some bloomin’ reformatory. Liza’s orl right, in’t yer, ole gel?”

“I don’t worn’t ter go ’ome, I don’t. I want anuvver drink, I does.”

“The pubs is orl closed, I tell yer.”

“I don’t keer, I will ’ave another drink. Besides, it’s miserable at ’ome, there ain’t no fire nor nothink.”

“Be quiet, Liza, there, I’m sure thet’s a cop a-coming, It’ll be orful cold at the pleece styshen ter-night.”

“She shall not go to the police-station,” said Joan Winscombe. “Come with me, Liza, and you shall have a warm fire to sit by.”

“Oo the — — — are you?” asked Eliza, interlarding her question with sanguinary adjectives.

“Only a friend who wants to help you.”

“Wy, theer’s ole Father Whitman,” shrieked the woman.

“Yus, I’ll go with ole Father Whitman, I will. ’Ee won’t let the cops git ’old on a poor gal, ’ee won’t.”

“Yus, thet’s it. Yoo go with old Father Whitman and the young lydy. I knoes theer plyce. It’s wawm and comfortable, it is. Emly Jenkins tole me.”

“Orl rite, I’ll go. Yoo’ll give me a drop o’ drink, Father Whitman, won’t yer? I am bloomin’ cold, I I am. Goo’-night, ole Goggle-eyes; goo’-night, Bill Bailey,” shrieked the woman, with a drunken laugh.

“We’ve a-treeted ’er kind, we ’ave, guvnor,” said one of the men, turning to Carew. “Awst ’er if we in’t. There’s no awm in Liza. She’s just drunk, thet’s orl. Ain’t gort the price of a pint abaat yer, ’ave yer?”

"The pubs are closed," said Carew, with a laugh; and he turned and walked by the side of Joan Winscombe, while the man who had been addressed as Father Whitman led the poor drunken woman along the street.

Carew had remembered Father Whitman's name during the conversation which had taken place. He recalled to his memory the article which Bagrie had spoken to him about, and which he had afterwards read in his club. He remembered, too, that he had conjured up a kind of mental picture of this man who, according to the article, was doing such a good work among the degraded and fallen of the East-End. He had imagined an old man dressed in semi-clerical attire, a man with mild eyes and a benevolent-looking face. This same city missionary, moreover, would, he thought, quote Scripture largely and give away a number of tracts. He realized, however, that this picture did not correspond with facts. It is true Father Whitman must be from fifty-five to sixty years of age, but there was no suggestion of age in his appearance. He walked with a firm, vigorous step, and was evidently a man of great physical strength. He was a broad-shouldered, deep-chested man, and his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest were accentuated by the short double-breasted jacket which he wore.

"You'd like to see this affair out, would you?" he said turning to Carew.

"Yes, I would."

"Journalist?"

"I have written for the papers, but I'm not a journalist in the ordinary way. Why do you ask?"

"Because there's no copy in this business. It's just a sordid case of a drunken woman, to whom we are going to give a night's lodging, and, if possible, a new start in life."

There was no suggestion of pietism in the man's mode of speech. Rather it was curt, and almost discourteous.

"I am afraid I am not over-interested in the woman," said Carew; "but I happen to know Miss Winscombe. It came upon me as a great surprise to find her here."

Father Whitman gave Carew a second glance. It was keen and searching. Evidently here was a man who was in the habit of reading men.

"Yes," said Joan, "Mr. Carew was with my father and me in Palestine."

"Carew, Carew," said Father Whitman, "Bamfield Carew, the man who—who occupied so much space in the papers a few weeks ago?"

"The same man," said Carew, with an uneasy laugh. He was wondering what Joan was thinking about.

The party stopped outside a plain-looking block of houses. As far as Carew could judge, several houses had been made into one large dwelling. Most of the windows were dark, but from some lights gleamed.

"You want to come in?" said Father Whitman, looking at Carew questioningly.

"If I may, certainly. By the way, I read an article about you in one of the papers the other day, and I have often thought since that I would like to visit you in the midst of your work."

In the meantime Joan Winscombe had led the woman into the passage, where she was met by a kindly-faced motherly-looking woman of about fifty years of age.

"Hollo! Muvver Whitman," said Liza, as she saw the woman. "Ain't I a nice cup o' tea? Did'n expect to see Lize Gudgin come to yer bloomin' show, did yer? But I was fair done up, I was, and I'd 'ad a raa with Goggle-eyes and Billy Bailey. Both good pals, they is, but I fair got sick on 'em."

"You're drunk, too," said Mrs. Whitman.

"Oo sed I worn't? I ain't a-denyin' it, am I? I ain't a-signed no bloomin' pledge, nor I ain't a-goin'ter—theer now, thet's straight."

"Well, you must have a bath, anyhow."

"Bath! I might as well go to the workus strite orf! Fancy Liza Gudgin 'avin' a bath! But 'ere goes! Muvver Whitman, you're a good sort, you are."

She was evidently in a better humour than when they had first met. Besides, although the room into which they had entered was barely furnished, it was warm and clean, and a bright fire burned in the grate.

"Now, Miss Winscombe," said Mrs. Whitman, "you just go to bed. You are dead tired, that's what you are. I'll see to Liza."

"Yus, Muvver Whitman and I'll do a treet," said Liza. "Never expected you'd get me 'ere, did yer? And now you've got me you won't keep me long."

"I'll stay up until you've seen the poor girl to bed," said Joan Winscombe; "you'll find me in my room. Good-night, Father Whitman; good-night, Mr. Carew," and she held out her hand to each in turn.

Carew longed to ask her to stay. For one thing, his surprise was very great at seeing her there, and he wanted to know what led her to come to that part of the city; for another, it seemed to him that all brightness and beauty would go out of the room when she left. Still, he did not ask her. He reflected that their relations had never been friendly, while now an insuperable barrier seemed to stand between them.

"You know Miss Winscombe, then?" said Father Whitman, when she had left them.

"Yes, but I had no idea she ever came down here."

"Oh, but she does. She's one of our best workers. She comes and takes her month down here as regular as clock-work."

"And what is your work?"

"To save men and women."

"What do you mean by that? Get such a woman as you have brought here to-night into a laundry?"

"That's an incident in salvation. No, I mean *save* men and women. Get them to think new thoughts, to have new purposes, and be filled with a new spirit."

"And how do you do that?"

"Get them converted."

Carew laughed. After all, this was a mere Salvation Army business. It was a repetition of the old played-out lies.

"You don't believe me?" asked Father Whitman.

"To be quite honest, I don't."

Father Whitman took another look at Carew, and as he looked his eyes sparkled.

"Look here," said the older man presently, "do I look a poor, soft, pulpy sort of creature? Do you think I am the kind of chap that can be taken in by lies?"

"That's hardly the question," replied Carew.

"What's the question then?"

"Facts."

"Good," said Father Whitman. He started to his feet and began to pace the room. As he did so, Carew noticed

the firm, decided footsteps of the man; he noted, too, the look of resolution upon his face. He realized, moreover, that here was no ordinary man. Energy, determination, foresight, and penetration suggested themselves in his every word and movement.

"I judge you are a bit of a character," said Father Whitman.

Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"I read about you some time ago in the papers."

"Lots of people did," replied Carew. "I am told I was the subject of many sermons."

"Many preachers are foolish."

"Evidently."

"You don't believe these people can be changed?"

"Oh, yes, I believe in education; I believe in humanitarian movements, but I don't believe in what you call conversion. I think some of you fellows are doing good work in helping the poor wretches who live in these parts. I believe, too, in better dwellings, better sanitary conditions. But I don't believe in what you call the religious part of your work."

"You don't know anything about it."

Again Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"The truth is," he went on, after a minute's silence, "I have spent the evening with a Jewish Rabbi, an able, intelligent, educated earnest man, and he tells me that the whole business is hopeless. Practically nothing can be done for these drink-sodden, lust-sodden wretches that live down here."

"Bosh."

"A short word."

"And a true one."

"Then twenty years' experience go for nothing?"

"One positive is worth a cartload of negatives, and I say that thirty years' experience goes for something."

"You've been doing this kind of work for thirty years?"

"Thirty years this very Christmas which is so close upon us."

"And how old are you?"

"Sixty-two."

"You look at least seven years younger."

"I am sixty-two, and I've worked here thirty years. I've

no organizations behind me. That is, I've no committees, no big names, no influential people to back me. But I've seen what I have seen."

"What have you seen?"

"I've seen——" Here Father Whitman stopped. He looked Carew straight in the eyes. "Do you mean business?" he went on. "I've no time to answer senseless questions, or to deal with *nonchalant* dudes who come quizzing around. It's now one o'clock in the morning, and I have seen no bed for fifteen hours. All the same, if you mean business, I want to ——"

"By Jove," said Carew, interrupting him, "is it that time? How am I to get home to-night? I want to talk with you, Father Whitman, but—but—can I get a cab?"

Father Whitman went to a telephone which was fixed in a corner of the room.

"When do you want a cab?" he asked.

"In an hour's time, if you can spare me so long; at once, if you can't."

Father Whitman rang up the nearest jobmaster. "A cab will be here in an hour from now," he said. He threw some coals on the fire, and drew a chair close to it.

"Might one smoke?" asked Carew.

"Till you are black," replied Father Whitman. "I'll join you if I may."

Again Carew cast a searching glance towards his companion. Never before had he seen a man so far removed from his conceptions of a city missionary.

Father Whitman took a briar-root pipe from the mantelpiece and began to smoke.

"The truth is," he went on, "the knowledge of such as you about such work as mine, wouldn't cover a three-penny piece."

"Perhaps many of us know more than you think. You know the old adage, 'Lookers-on see most of the game.' Besides, as I told you, I've just had a conversation with a man who has lived here for over twenty years. An educated, earnest, good man. His experience is that when once the vices of this part of London get hold of a man or woman, nothing can save them. He believes in educating the children and trying to surround them with good influences, but even as far as these are concerned he's very pessimistic.

The taint of the beast is in their blood, and it will take many generations to get it out, even with all the resources of science and civilization."

"And he's right," said Father Whitman.

Carew looked at him questioningly.

"Yes, he's right," repeated Father Whitman. "After thirty years' experience I repeat it. Mind you, all those things may be good—they are good. But it is only a matter of putting a sticking-plaster on a cancer. Yes, I've seen them all at work. Shelters! oh, yes. It's right to give a man a place to lie of a cold night, but he's no different the next morning. Soup kitchens! All very good. Only this I know. People who came to soup-kitchens ten years ago come to-day. Put people in better houses! Oh, yes, that's right, too. But what then? They don't want better houses, and even if they get them, they turn the better houses into pig-sties. I'm talking now about the class which we both have in our mind. Employment! 'Deal with the unemployed question,' says the social reformer; 'give employment to every man!' Good again. But the great problem is not with the unemployed but with the unemployable!"

"And yet you are a religious man."

"I've a prejudice that way."

Carew laughed quietly. "You are an honest man, Father Whitman," he said, "only I'm hanged if I can see why you keep up the pretence of religion."

"I don't."

"But you've admitted the pretence. Oh, I tried to keep it up for years, but I chucked it. It wouldn't work. It was a tissue of absurd stories, and so I just——"

"Yes, I know what you did," said Father Whitman. "It was in all the papers, you know."

"I didn't quite mean that," said Carew, rather uneasily; "but there you are. Here you are in this cesspool of humanity. If there's any truth in religion, you are better than God. You, at least, are trying to do something for them, while God does nothing. He sits up aloft and——"

"Young man," interrupted Father Whitman, "have you realized that when you try to spell God you tackle a big job?"

"Yes, I do realize it. All the same I have to use what

brains I possess. I suppose there is a great eternal force at the heart of all things, a kind of eternal will, perhaps an intelligence, but as for the rest—well——"

"You are leaving out something," said Father Whitman.

"What?"

"Both you and that Jewish Rabbi, and the whole gang of such as you, are leaving out the most important factor."

"What?" repeated Carew.

"Christ."

Carew laughed again, but presently became serious.

"A good man who lived in a dark, ignorant age," he said; "a man whose life is surrounded by hosts of wild, unbelievable stories. A man upon whose memory churches have been built, creeds born, and in whose name bloody wars have been waged. For the memory of Jesus I have a great reverence, but for the Christ-myth—well, as you know, science and history and all the best forces of civilization have discarded it."

"I know nothing of the sort."

"Perhaps you have not kept abreast of modern science. That science has declared your Christian miracles to be so many fairy tales."

"What a pity people don't confine their judgments to things they know something about," said Father Whitman.

"I don't follow you."

"Exactly. Miracles! Why, I've seen miracles which make many of the New Testament miracles seem commonplace. Christ-myth! If Christ is a myth then you land yourself in one of the deepest swamps I know of."

"How?"

"Look here!" cried Father Whitman, rising to his feet, "excuse me for walking around the room, but I can always say what I mean better when I am walking around. I want you, who talk about the Christ-myth, to explain me."

"Explain you?"

"Yes, me. I am not one who believes in spouting about my own badness; I don't stand up in public meetings and tell how many times I've been to prison, and what crimes I've been guilty of. Mark you, there may be times when such a course of procedure is necessary, but I'm not one who likes doing it. All the same, I want to put you this question. Miss Winscombe has told me a little about you, and I

remember the correspondence in the newspapers about you. You didn't believe in Christ, and so, to save your life, you trampled on the cross. You believe there was a good man called Jesus, but the Christ-idea—that is a myth. You don't believe in Christ's Divinity; you don't believe in His power to save men; you believe that the whole fabric of Christianity is built upon a tissue of fairy tales, superstitions, lies. Very well, I want you to explain me."

"Still I don't understand."

"No, but you will in a minute. My father was a drunkard; my mother—well, some people think of their mothers with tenderness and reverence. I can't think of my mother in that way. You've seen the woman we brought here to-night. Well, my mother belonged to a class lower than that. I was born in a slum in Whitechapel. I have been told that my mother wanted me to die, and would have murdered me if she had not been afraid. As it was I should have starved but for one or two kindly people who took pity on me. As soon as I was old enough I was taught to lie, to beg, to steal. When I was but a little nipper my mother left my father, with whom she'd been living, and—well, what's the use of talking about that? Perhaps she wasn't so much to blame. Her mother had been a bad woman, who had brought her up to be—what she was. I saw the life she was living, but I didn't care. Why should I? Young as I was, I saw that among her class it was the order of the day. As for my father, he was a dock labourer, public-house loafer, a noted fighter, a man who never took the name of God upon his lips except to blaspheme.

"Now, then, you can guess something of the stock from which I sprung, you can form some idea of my upbringing. I grew up just as the rest of my class grew up. I was as strong as a horse, and became a noted local fighter. Before I was seventeen there wasn't a vice that I didn't know first-hand. By the time I was five-and-twenty I had sunk as low as any blackguard in the East End of London. Lazy, quarrelsome, drink-sodden, lust-sodden, a terror to decent people. Yes, I belonged not simply to the unemployed class, I belonged to the unemployable. A great hulking, evil-living, evil-thinking, foul-mouthed drunken outcast. All sorts of people tackled me, but I was of the class which neither science nor civilization could touch. I didn't want to be

anything else. Let me have something to eat and drink, especially drink, let me be a beast, and I was satisfied. Now you know something of the kind of man I was. If I worked it was because there were times when I couldn't get food and a night's lodging without it. Well, one night I got kicked out of the pubs, no one would treat me, and I had no money. I was hungry too, and it was bitterly cold. 'Unless I can get shelter,' I said. 'I shall die of the cold.' Presently I passed by a soup kitchen, a place, too, where beds were offered at twopence a night. But I hadn't got twopence. 'One of these "Bible-pills" places, I expect,' I said, 'but here goes.'

"I had a plate of soup, and then I asked for a bed. The chap that took charge of the beds knew me. 'Got tuppence, Jack?' he said. 'No,' I replied. Whereupon he said he'd lend me the money.

"Presently I heard somebody singing close by. 'What's that?' I asked.

"'Meetin',' was the reply. 'Go in?'

"I told the chap as 'ow I'd see him further first; but after a bit, as lots of others went in, I thought I'd just look in for a lark.

"Now then, Mr. Carew, I went in. They were singing 'Just as I am, without one plea,' and after a bit I got to enjoy it. They sang it over again and again, and after that a chap got up and talked. He knew his business, did the chap, and he knew the likes of me, and as he talked I seemed to see myself as I might be. Not a dirty swill-tub, not the offscourings of life, not a thing with the desires of the lowest kind of beast, with just a bit more brains than a dog, but a man; a man with self-respect, a man who could hold up his head with other men, a man who was respected. It was a kind of vision, for I saw myself not only as I was, but as I could be. But what hope was there for such as I? How could I be anything else but a walking swill-tub, an unclean, low-minded beast? Then I listened to the chap who was preaching again, and I heard him say that Christ could make me clean. Mark that; could make me, Jack Whitman, clean; could give me a new heart, a new purpose, a new spirit. He told me I could be converted.

"Lots of such chaps as you laugh at that. The Jewish Rabbi doesn't believe in it, perhaps, because he doesn't

believe in Christ. Christ-myth, eh? Sounds well, doesn't it? This I know, I got converted that night. I, Jack Whitman. After thirty years I can't get over the wonder of it, for I did feel a new life, a new hope, a new spirit, a new determination, a new strength within me. I, Jack Whitman, became a new man through accepting Christ as my Saviour.

"That was over thirty years ago, Mr. Carew. For thirty years I've lived my life, and done my work down here where everybody knows me, and where some of the older people know what I was. And this is the question I want to ask. If Jesus Christ is only a myth, how do you explain me?"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CHALLENGE

DURING the latter part of Father Whitman's narrative Carew watched him with a look of eagerness upon his face. There could be no doubt about it, the man who was speaking was deadly in earnest. Conviction breathed in every tone of his voice, in every word he spoke. Moreover, Carew admired strong men, and he had to admit that Father Whitman was of that order. Everything about the man suggested strength and conviction. Moreover, he was not of the order to be imposed upon. His conversation had revealed the fact that he had a vigorous mind, that he had studied men, and that he had tested life from many stand points. The broad shoulders and deep chest revealed the man of herculean bodily strength, the square brow, the strong features, the flashing eyes, told of shrewd common-sense, nay, more, they suggested thinking powers which were far above the ordinary. So much was this so, that for the moment the man had convinced him almost in spite of himself. But it was only for a moment. A thousand questions came flashing into his mind. The phenomenon of this man's change of life could be explained by purely human means, and he would discover what those means were. All he said, however, was :

"One swallow does not make a summer, Father Whitman."

"But one swallow suggests that summer is coming, Mr. Carew. However, that is not the question. The question is, how do you explain me?"

"I cannot for the moment. There are forces of which I know nothing. There may have been some strain of goodness lying dormant in your being, which strong emotion aroused."

"My dear man, is strong emotion going to keep a man for thirty years? If it will, where does it come from? Talk about miracles, I am a miracle. Here was I, a low, skulking blackguard, diseased in body, mind and soul. A thing which revelled in bestiality. Is a strong emotion going to change all this in a moment, and keep me straight for thirty years?"

"Has it kept you straight for thirty years? Did you never fall during all that time?"

Father Whitman hung his head for a moment. "Yes, God knows there were times when I thought all was over. I had to fight hard, God only knows how hard, for years."

"Ah, there it is, you see. A matter of human will?"

"Yes, but who gave me the will? I had never tried to be a man before then. I didn't want to. But I did afterwards. Besides, Mr. Carew, God never does for a man what he can do for himself. I had to do my part in salvation. It was not much, and but for Christ I could never have done it."

"How do you know?"

"Why, many's the time when I've been on the point of falling, I've had to cry out in prayer, and the prayer gave me power. Why, man, I'm not talking of something I know nothing about. I've been through the mill. Before that night I did not want to be a better man; I revelled in things unclean; but afterwards—well, there was the call of the wild, all the base instincts of a diseased mind, a diseased body and a diseased soul were clamouring for satisfaction, but even while they clamoured I hated them. I wanted to be a man, a clean man. Who or what made the change in me?"

"You feared hell-fire, perhaps?"

"Hell-fire! I didn't believe in it. In my own way I was an atheist. I had heard the park-gate orators, and I'd read infidel tracts. I no more believed in hell than you do."

No, it wasn't that; I wanted to be, longed to be a man. That was why I fought and prayed, that was why I went to Christ for help. And more, the better chap I was, the more real did Christ become to me, until, yes, I conquered—conquered! No, I'm not talking nonsense. I did become a man. Now, then, is not that a miracle? And more, if your 'Christ-myth' talk is true, will you please explain me?"

"At the moment I cannot; as I said there may have been some strain in your nature which, being aroused, caused new desires and new hopes."

"Well, admitting that there was, what aroused this dormant strain of goodness, and how was it that I learnt to hate the things I loved? How was it that the old things passed away?"

"I reply again that I cannot tell; and I repeat that one swallow does not make a summer."

"Yes, but what Christ has done for me, He has done for others—yes, hundreds of others. Not hearsay cases, but I can take you to hundreds of men and women who were down as low as I was, men and women who were the despair of your scientists and your humanitarians, and they have been saved just as I was. Look here; you know what the world's cry in relation to these people is. Education, better housing, popular concerts, soup kitchens, blankets, charity, clubs, and prisons. Well, they are in the main good things. I've tried them all, and I use every one of 'em, except the last. But do they change men? 'Educate, educate!' is the cry; but does education change a man's heart? A new terror has arisen in London—the terror of Hooliganism. What does that mean? Why, numbers of boys and girls who know how to read and write; who have been taught morality, and all the rest of it; and what is the result? Hooligans! Go through the whole list? And what is the result? Ask any man who has lived among these people and they will tell you. I tell you the disease is too deep for these sticking plasters to cure. If you cure you must go to the heart of the business, and that is what Christ does."

"Do you mean to say," said Carew, "that you can produce many cases of—of conversion similar to your own?"

"Hundreds, mister, hundreds. Come to one of my meetings of a Sunday night, and if you ask for proof of Christ's power to save from drink and devilry, a hundred will rise up and from personal experience say 'Yes.' But that is not all; their neighbours will testify to the same thing. I'm only one of a great army down here who have been redeemed by Christ."

Carew was silent for a minute, then he said, "I believe you are an honest man, Father Whitman, and I am certain that you believe in all you have told me. But I was brought up a Christian; I was taught to adore Christ."

"You were a Roman Catholic, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I know a lot of good Roman Catholics," said Father Whitman. "There are two or three priests in this neighbourhood who work like galley slaves, and I respect them."

"But you don't believe in them?"

"I don't say that. Many of them have the root of the matter in them; all the same the religion which saved me, the Christ which saved me, is not the Christ whose church is confined to one sect; it's not the Christ who demands an acceptance of a lot of creeds; it's not the Christ who wants a lot of millinery and smoke and masses. Of course if that kind of thing will save people, for God's sake let them have it. As far as my experience goes it doesn't work. I've known lots of chaps who have gone to church for a kind of weekly white-washing. They have gone to Mass, they have confessed and they have received absolution—only they've been as bad as ever before the day was over. But that's not my business. Many of them are sincere good people, only my experience has told me that that kind of thing doesn't go to the root of the matter. It doesn't give men a new heart."

"Well, what about your Protestant churches and chapels," said Carew. "They seem to believe that religion consists of going to a reception which the Almighty holds once or twice a week."

"There's a great deal of truth in that, too, I am afraid," said Father Whitman, "and there again I find the same thing obtains. Many of these people preach fine sermons

and all that kind of thing. but as for getting down to the roots of a man's life, nothing but conversion will do that. All the same. I can't deny one thing. These same churches send people like Miss Winscombe down here. Yes, they do. Miss Winscombe and many others leave their fine houses and come down here, and amidst sin and squalor and crime they give their lives to Christ's service."

"Slumming is the fashion just now," remarked Carew, and there was a sneer in his voice.

"It was a few years ago, but it didn't remain the fashion," replied Father Whitman. "These fine ladies who came down here because slumming seemed a fine thing, quickly gave it up."

"They've not all given it up?" remarked Carew.

"No, not all. But who are they who keep on? They who feel Christ in their hearts. That's my experience. But for Christ we should have precious few who work in these parts to reclaim the people."

"Why," replied Carew, "I have heard that hosts of fine ladies came to the East End of London and ran clubs and guilds on purely rationalistic lines. They kept out religion altogether."

"Yes, and where are they now? Those fine ladies have with but few exceptions given it up. They have lacked the dynamic which Christ gives, which alone could cause them to continue. I tell you this, sir. After thirty years' experience I've come to see this: it's Christ who keeps them at their posts, and if they don't possess Christ, well, they give up."

"And their clubs, their guilds?"

"Very good things, but they don't change the heart."

Carew was silent for a few seconds; he was thinking deeply.

"You don't believe me?" remarked Father Whitman.

"Yes, I believe in you, but I don't believe in your theories. I don't believe in your Christ, save that He was a very good Man and a sublime character. I don't believe in the conversion side of your work. I believe that all you have seen done could be done without religion. Given the same circumstances, the same characters, and you'd have the same results even if your Christ and your religion were eliminated."

"Would you be willing to put your belief to the test?" asked Father Whitman, eagerly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. You come down here, and give *your* theories a trial. You are an educated man, a travelled man, a man who knows five times as much about scholarship as I do. Very well, let us choose a number of people; the worst we can find. You shall do all you can do without religion. You are a man of money, you can provide clubs, you can help financially, you can provide games, amusements, education classes and all the rest of it, but you must not mention Christ, you must not pray. I, on the other hand, will do what I can do, but in my case Christ must be first and foremost. I work as a Christ's man, you work as one who looks upon that kind of thing as so much nonsense."

"Well, what then?"

"Then," replied Father Whitman, "why this, if you succeed and I fail, I'll confess that you are right and I am wrong. And more, I'll turn atheist again. But if I succeed and you fail—well, then you will own that I am right, and you turn Christian."

"No," said Carew, "I do not agree to that."

"Why? Are you afraid? I am not. I believe in Christ; I'm prepared to put Him to the test. The God that answers by fire, let Him be God."

Father Whitman's eyes shone with a bright light. To him there was nothing wrong, nothing suggestive of irreverence in his challenge. After all Christianity does not make a rough man reared in the slums a polished gentleman in a day, and the man who has been taken from those slums does not immediately adopt the tactics of a Doctor of Divinity. Father Whitman was certain as to his faith, and he wanted to convert Carew. He was willing to stake anything to accomplish this end, and he saw nothing incongruous in his challenge.

"Will you, Mr. Carew?" continued Father Whitman eagerly. "Some time ago you asked for facts. I'm willing to stand by facts, by results. You don't believe in miracles. Now, then——"

The wheels of a cab were heard outside the door.

"Ah, there's my Jehu," said Carew, starting to his feet.

"I must be off."

"Will you take me?" asked the old man. "Will you accept my challenge? If you are right you have nothing to fear."

"I'll think about it."

"That's only another way of backing out."

"But suppose you turn out to be right? I couldn't be a Christian just by saying I was."

"No, but look here, will you accept the challenge, and if I am right, will you give Christ a chance with you? That's all I ask. I don't ask you to be a Christian. I only say, give Christ a chance. If He's only a myth, nothing will happen; but if——"

"I'll think it over."

"That's the attitude of a coward. Will you, who trampled on the cross, and who say the whole thing is a tissue of fables, put the thing to a test, and stand by the result?"

Carew shook his head.

"Then you have a sneaking belief, after all. You are not sure of your ground. You are afraid to put the thing to a test."

"No, no, I'm not."

"Then you accept the challenge?"

"Yes."

He did not mean to utter the word, but it slipped out before he was aware he had spoken. He laughed uneasily as he spoke, but Father Whitman's face beamed with satisfaction.

"Good. When will you come down that we can make arrangements? Shall we say to-morrow afternoon?"

He felt something as he had felt at Tel Moloch many weeks before. Nothing had any meaning to him. He had no faith. Of course, the challenge was only a good joke, but—well, it was a sportsmanlike thing to do on old Father Whitman's part.

"Very well—to-morrow afternoon."

"What time?"

"Say half-past three."

"All right; I'll be here."

Carew left the house, and drove away. Father Whitman went to his room and prayed earnestly for a long time.

It was not until the next day that Carew realized what he had done. During his journey home from Father Whitman's

Mission House, everything was confused. Thoughts of Joan Winscombe, Eliza Gudgeon, and his talk with the old man were so mingled that nothing was clear to him. When he woke next morning, however, he realized what he had done. He had accepted the old missionary's challenge to engage in trying to reform some of the worst characters in the East End without resorting to religion. He had accepted this challenge without premeditation, and on the impulse of the moment. Still, he was a sportsman and would stand by his word.

Well, suppose he failed, while Father Whitman succeeded? What then? After all, nothing much was attached to the conditions. He would simply, to use Father Whitman's words, "Give Christ a fair chance"—that was all, and that was not of much consequence.

Besides, there was another factor in his adventure which made his pulses throb. He would in all probability see Joan Winscombe with greater frequency than would be otherwise possible. The sight of her had come upon him as a great surprise. He had not the ghost of an idea that she gave much time to work among the fallen and the degraded in the East End of London. He thought of her as she had bidden him "good-night," and his heart burned with a great love.

Directly after lunch he turned his face eastward.

A little later he reached Father Whitman's mission. He was evidently expected, for the old man came to him with outstretched hands, and warm words of welcome on his lips. When he was shown into the room where he had been the previous night, his heart thrilled with joy, for amongst the others in the room he saw Joan Winscombe.

She rose and held out her hand.

"Father Whitman told me you were coming," she said; "that was why we arranged to have our tea early. This is not a busy time of the day with us, our real work comes later on. You know Mrs. Whitman, don't you, so I have no need to introduce you to her. This"—turning towards a young lady by her side—"is my friend, Miss Blackwell, and this is the Rev. George Trengrove."

The young man to whom she turned as she mentioned the name was a young man of about twenty-seven. There was no suggestion of a cleric in his attire. He wore a dark tweed

suit and a red necktie. Indeed, he had the appearance of a young farmer, or squire, rather than that of a cleric.

"Mr. Trengrove is one of the workers of the Trinity House," she said, "and Trinity House is a University Settlement in these parts. Mr. Trengrove is having a couple of years' work here before taking an East End church."

Carew did not take kindly to Mr. Trengrove. It is true he had a manly appearance, and was on the whole a fine handsome fellow ; but Carew did not like the look in the young minister's eyes as he looked on Joan Winscombe ; neither did he feel happy at the good terms which evidently existed between the two.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ARRANGING TERMS

"You have no objection to our discussing our bargain, Mr. Carew?" said Father Whitman presently. "We are all good friends here, and have the same ends in view."

"Oh, no," said Carew, somewhat uneasily. As a matter of fact he felt annoyed that the old man should introduce the subject, especially in the presence of Trengrove, but he did not see how he could refuse his request.

"The truth is," said Father Whitman, "Mr. Carew and I have had—well, a wager. He does not believe in the 'conversion' part of our work here, while I maintain that without it we might as well put sticking-plasters on a cancer. By the way, do you ladies object to our smoking? I've not had a pipe for the day yet."

Consent having been given, Carew lit a cigar, while Father Whitman took a briar-root that lay on the mantelpiece. As for Trengrove, he produced a black pipe from his pocket which had evidently seen a great deal of service.

"I have stated the case truly, haven't I, Mr. Carew?" continued the old man as he sat back in his chair.

"Quite correctly," replied Carew, turning his eyes towards Joan Winscombe, who, he saw, was watching him closely.

"The wager is this," went on Father Whitman. "We are to choose a number of the worst characters in the neighbourhood. I suggest two men and two women."

"Each?" asked Carew.

"Just as you please," was the reply. "It doesn't matter to me. It is my life work. Well, we will see to it first that they are of the class which defies science and civilization, as is ordinarily understood. God knows there are enough to choose from. I am going to take Mr. Carew to a place to-night where we shall be able to make our choice. Now, then, Mr. Carew doesn't believe in religion. I do. In fact, religion is everything to me. Mr. Carew is not going to use prayer, I am; he's not going to mention the name of Christ, I am. Mr. Carew says he's going to reform the characters of those he selects by purely rational means: I'm going to use rational means, too, but those means are to be just saturated with religious influences. Then, if I fail and Mr. Carew succeeds, I am going to turn infidel; if I succeed and he fails, well—he's going to give Christ a chance. That's the state of the case, isn't it, Mr. Carew?"

If Father Whitman really understood the man to whom he was talking he would have adopted other methods; but he did not. He was unacquainted with Carew's early associations and with his methods of thinking. He was simply a man from the slums who had daily intercourse with the most depraved of mankind. He could not, therefore, appreciate the niceties of language; he did not realize that his every word wounded Carew and gave him exquisite pain. In fact the young man felt like getting up and leaving the room. He did not, however, for he felt Joan Winscombe's eyes upon him, and he knew that he would lower himself in her estimation if he took offence at the old man's rough methods of speaking. Besides, it was a true statement of the case, and it would be cowardice on his part if he refused to go on. He knew that Joan Winscombe felt angry with him for denying the Christian faith when attacked by the Arabs, knew that she despised him for trampling on the Christian symbol. He did not believe in Christianity then; he did not believe in it now, and he had his opportunity for justifying his action before the woman he loved. He would show her what he did he did with reason, and perhaps when he had proved to her that religion was only a name and not a force, she would become sensible and no longer condemn him for doing a perfectly rational and reasonable thing. He felt sure that she would think kindly of him but for this religious

bugbear, and when by perfectly sensible and rational means he had produced just as good results as Father Whitman had produced by his religion, he would have removed one of the obstacles which stood in the way of winning her as his wife. Besides, in order to carry out his part of the bargain he would constantly be brought into association with her, and he determined to make the most of his opportunities.

"Of course you will stand by your bargain?" said the old missionary.

"Oh, yes," replied Carew. "I'll play the game, but we must have the ground cleared."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, for one thing, I must not be interfered with. I must go my own way. You need not fear, I shall not introduce any Gospel talk. My work is to make the people whom I choose want to live a decent, respectable life. I promise no pious cant phrases. It's not my business to make my people into church-going, Sabbath-keeping, professing believers. My only claim is that they shall be made decent, respectable members of the community. I don't promise that they shall be teetotallers and that they shall never play a game of cards, or anything of that sort, but simply that they shall become self-respecting people."

"Oh, yes, that's fair and square, I agree to that," said Father Whitman, "only I must stipulate that you shall not use any of the religious agencies that are at work. I must insist on that, because, you see, that would be doing your work with my tools. This must be a test of methods, and we want to see which will work best."

"Yes, but let us be fair," said Carew. "You, I gather, intend to use all your machinery. You have your workers, your clubs, your institutions, your music, while I stand alone."

"Get all the help you can," replied Father Whitman. "Bring as many helpers as you like, spend all the money you like, have as many institutions as you like. All I insist on is that none of your helpers shall introduce religion in any form—indeed, to carry out our bargain with perfect fairness, your helpers must be as destitute of faith as yourself."

"I agree to that again," said Carew. Now that the ice was broken he felt a certain sense of enjoyment in discussing arrangements. He knew that Joan Winscombe was listening

to him, and he was as anxious as Father Whitman himself that the methods should be tried fairly. Indeed, he was becoming really interested in the whole question. He felt like a doctor who was willing to stake his reputation in fighting against what he believed to be a played-out fallacy.

After this the conversation became more general, until, as daylight departed, Trengrove and Father Whitman rose to leave the room. They had work to do, they said, which must be attended to at once.

Shortly after, Carew was left alone with Joan Winscombe. This was more than he had dared to hope for, and when he saw that Joan seemed ready to talk with him he congratulated himself on the circumstances which had brought them together.

"I am glad of this opportunity of speaking to you alone, Miss Winscombe," he said. "Since I was at your house I have felt that I was entitled to say something to you—in—self-justification."

She looked at him questioningly.

"You are thinking of your bargain with Father Whitman," she said.

"Do you think that needs any self-justification?" he asked.

"Perhaps so."

"I am afraid I do not understand."

"No? Of course, we look at things differently. I know that Father Whitman's motives are perfectly pure, and yet I do not like the idea—of—of your bargain."

"Why?"

"Because the salvation of men and women should never be dependent on anything sordid. Indeed, I tried to persuade him not to persist in it."

"Why, pray?"

"Because it is a bargain which depends on the salvation of human lives. It assumes that the power of God can be commanded at will. Personally, the thought is repulsive."

"Why? Are you afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid. But work so sacred as this should not be associated with a wager. Still, Father Whitman insists, and I am sure he will be a very Shylock in insisting upon his bond."

"I am afraid it does not appeal to me in that way," said Carew. "Naturally, I look at the whole matter differently from the way you look at it. As a matter of fact, I am becoming deeply interested. I am inclined to look upon the wager as an interesting experiment, and therefore am eager to see how events will work out; but it was not of that I was thinking when I said I wanted to justify myself."

Again she looked at him questioningly.

"What I wanted to say," he went on, "was this: when I was at your house you declined to try and persuade your father to accept any help from me in the matter of writing his book. You did this because my power to help him was the outcome of an action which you regard as sacrilege, blasphemy."

"Yes," replied Joan—"that is true. Perhaps I have been harsh in my thoughts towards you; indeed, I am sure I have. I was so horrified at what you did that I was not able to think of everything calmly. I did not realize the state of your mind; I did not consider what I should be tempted to do myself if I believed as you did. The Christian faith is so much to me that the thought of the Cross on which Christ died is very sacred. I have seen what it has meant in the lives of these people down here. I have not helped Father Whitman as much as I ought—I have spent too much time out of London; but I have seen enough to know that the Christian faith is not a mere name, enough to be sure that Christ is not a myth, but a reality. That was why I was harsh and uncharitable in my thoughts. And it was not right; it was not Christian."

Carew's eyes shone with joy. Instead of him trying to justify himself before her, she was apologizing for her own treatment of him. It seemed to him as though the barrier between them was breaking down. Of course, he had no faith in her religion. How could he, knowing what he did? Moreover, he felt sure he would never have any faith in it, and he determined to prove to her that he was not an agnostic without reason. He would sail under no false colours, nor pretend to anything in which he had no faith. Nevertheless, there was one matter which he wanted to put before her in its true light.

"I daresay you were quite justified, thinking as you did, in regarding my action as blasphemous," he said. "Indeed,

it is that which I want to speak about. Mind, I do not profess any faith in your religion ; if I did, I should be dishonest. Still, I am anxious that you should think the best you can of me. As you know, I was brought up a Roman Catholic, and as a consequence, I, unlike you Protestants, have not been a reader of the New Testament. What I know of the Bible I know through the teachings of my religious instructors, who were priests. As a consequence, the Man Jesus became something entirely different from the conception of Him which one gathers from reading the New Testament as one reads any other piece of literature. As I grew to think, Jesus always became associated with the mumblings of priests and the sacrifice of the Mass. He was a kind of Deity in whose name and with whose person the priests pretended to work miracles. Presently I entirely lost faith in this ; it was all unreal, mechanical, having no more basis in truth than the other superstitions. Then, when I saw what crimes had been done in the name of Jesus, when I read the history of the Dutch Republic, the treatment of the Huguenots in France, and the horrors of the Inquisition, I felt something like Voltaire felt when he cried : 'Crush the wretch.' By-and-by I became imbued with another phase of thought. After all, the Christ-idea was born in a superstitious age, the whole conception was legendary ; it was part of the evolution of the human mind. Comte, you know, makes this very plain. Until, naturally—well, I gave up the whole thing. I could not help it. Thus, when I met you in Jerusalem, Christ was nothing to me but a discredited tradition, while Christianity was a tissue of fairy tales which had gathered around the name of Jesus through the ages. In the main that is what Christianity—indeed, all religion—is to me now.

"But in one thing I was mistaken. When I was talking with you at your father's house, you said that it was an ignoble thing to mock the death of a noble man. I did not feel it very much then, but on my way to my chambers that day I called at a book-shop, and out of curiosity bought a New Testament. I read the story which is attributed to Matthew, and the one said to be written by John."

Joan Winscombe, who had been looking steadily into the fire all the time he had been speaking, now lifted her eyes eagerly.

"And——?" she said.

"I realized this," went on Carew, "then when you have stripped Jesus of all the false trappings with which the Church has invested Him, He was a noble man. I realized that he was a Man of lofty ideals, a pure soul; a Man of great and far-reaching thoughts, one who laid down His life for what He believed to be the truth. If ever a man died a noble death it was Jesus, and it came to me that in trampling on the cross I had mocked the death of a noble Man. He was doubtless a visionary, doubtless mistaken, but He was a great Man, a sincere Man, as great, if not greater, than Confucius or Socrates. Therefore I did wrong in trampling on the cross; in a way it was blasphemy, it was sacrilege. But please remember I had never realized what a noble Man He was nor how truly altruistic was His life. That is my justification, Miss Winscombe, and although it doubtless means but little to you, I thought I would like to tell you."

Joan Winscombe did not reply for some time, but after a period of silence she said:

"And that is all Jesus is to you now?"

"That is all."

"And you've accepted the challenge of Father Whitman——"

"To prove to him that what he calls modern miracles can be proved to be the results of purely natural causes, just as much as the so-called ancient miracles can either be explained or disproved by increasing knowledge."

"Have you ever lived among these people, Mr. Carew?"

"No."

"You know nothing about them?"

"Very little. Of course I have had some little to do with the class of which we are speaking, but have not taken much interest in them. As far as I can judge, the vice of the West of London is just as bad as the vice of the East. There may be a little veneer to make it look respectable, but that is about all the difference. Nevertheless, although I never intended to accept such a challenge as that of Father Whitman, I am glad he made it. It will be in the nature of an experiment, and I have very little doubt about the result."

"Your purpose is to try and prove that Christianity is not necessary."

"If you like to put it that way, yes."

A strange smile passed over Joan Winscombe's face.

"You do not believe I shall succeed?" he asked.

"I am sure you will not," she replied.

Carew said nothing, but the look in his eyes showed his determination to succeed.

Presently Father Whitman came back again, and after a simple meal, he and Carew went out alone.

"I should like you to see the kind of material upon which I have been working for more than a quarter of a century," he said.

"And where are you going?" asked the young man.

"Oh! I thought we might call at a few public-houses, a few common lodging-houses, and—well, places which are unknown to the police."

"Can you gain admission?"

"Every one knows Father Whitman," replied the old man. "Mind you, I don't ask you to select your people from those we are going to see. The time to do that will be about midnight to-night, but in the meanwhile we'll just look around."

The streets were now full of people. Children played in the gutters, youths and girls were heard shrieking and shouting in every direction. The children especially attracted Carew's attention. Although a bachelor, he had a great fondness for children. He loved to gather them around him and tell them fairy tales. Many to whom he was not related called him "Uncle Bamfield," and rejoiced when he visited them. But these children almost made him shudder. There was no look of childhood on their faces. They had grown old even when they were young.

"A bit different from Berkeley Square, eh?" remarked Father Whitman, looking around.

"Yes, a bit," assented Carew. "Your thirty years of Christian work has not done very much."

Father Whitman did not reply in words, but led the way to a house in the middle of a long, ugly street. He knocked at the door and then putting his head inside, cried out cheerily, "Any one at home?"

"Is that you, Father Whitman?" he heard some one say. "Come in."

Father Whitman entered the house, Carew following close at his heels. A minute later they had entered a small room where a man, his wife and five children were partaking of their evening meal.

"Hello, George!" said Father Whitman, "you look as though you had a good appetite."

"Appetite! I should think I have, and so would you if you'd been working at the docks all day. The air comes up keen an' cold from the river, I can tell yer. But my appetite in't nothin' to that of these youngsters. Is it, Mariar?"

"That it in't. But thenk the Loard they've enough to ait, every one on 'em."

"Comin' to meetin' to-night, George?" asked the missionary.

"Yus, I'll git raand as soon as I've helped the missus 'ere to put the kids to bed."

"Things goin' pretty well, George?"

"Middlin'. We've sived up the rent, and if ther's no sickness we'll be orl rite. But I'm a-goin' ter get out o' this, Father Whitman."

"How's that?"

"Well," replied the man, "it's a year since I got converted, and now I sees as 'ou I ort to giv' the kids a chawnce. They 'ear no good in the streets 'ere, and ther's no plyce elst for 'em to ply close by, so I'm a-goin' to try and git a plyce aat in the country like. I c'n come up by the workmen's trynes. I 'eerd only yesterday of a plyce daan by Eppin' Forest."

"You may be right, George. You've got over the drink yourself, have you?"

"I in't a-touched a drop for more'n six months, guvnor, an' s'w'elp me Gawd, I'll never touch it again. No more will Mariar, will you, old gal?"

"Never!" said the woman. "I've 'ad enough of that, Mr. Whitman, I 'ave, and I woonts the kids to grow up respectable Christians, I does."

They stayed in the cottage a few minutes and then passed out into the street again.

"Not a palace, not Eaton Square, eh?" suggested Father Whitman.

"No, but the place was clean, and the people seemed decent respectable folk."

"Yes. You wouldn't believe that that man has been to prison six times, would you? You wouldn't believe that the woman has been one of the worst characters for miles around?"

Carew was silent.

"Yet that is the truth. Both of them defied what you call civilization and science; there weren't two worse people east of Aldgate than George and Maria Berry. They'd been living together for years, living like pigs in a sty. They weren't married, and—and—well, what's the use of talking? Their children were—like the worst of these. George was a thief, a burglar, a blackguard. His wife got money—any way she could. Both were drunkards. Well, one night, I persuaded them to come to my mission and they got converted."

"How long ago?"

"A year. No, I know it's not a settled work yet. Both George and Maria will have a hard fight. The first thing I did was to get 'em married. They said, 'as 'ow it made 'em feel more respectable like.' George isn't a polished gentleman now, is he? But he isn't the same man that he was a year ago. I just took you to see him that you might think about what you said. Don't you remember? You said that religion hadn't done much for these people. It's done something for George, anyhow. He's going to move away. I knew he would six weeks ago. I could take you to scores of houses like that of George. Such things ar'n't talked about in the papers, but Christ is not dead, Mr. Carew. What would these parts be without Him?"

After that they spent hours in going to public-houses, into places where men and women lived together without a thought of the laws of decency, and again into rooms where, in order to be decent, women and girls slaved for starvation wages.

Presently the clock of a neighbouring church struck eleven.

Carew walked by Father Whitman's side thoughtfully, but he did not speak a word.

"I've been thinking, Mr. Carew," he went on presently, "that it's about time for me to take you to the place where we can choose our raw material. Mind you, I don't ask you to take my choice. Make your own choice, man, make your

own. But come with me. At any rate, I think you'll be interested."

Father Whitman led the way towards the river. They crossed a main thoroughfare, and presently entered a dark-looking alley. A few minutes later the two men entered the doorway of a house, which was dimly lighted, but which struck Carew as being of fairly large proportions.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE INMATES OF AN EAST END DOSS-HOUSE

"WHAT'S this?" asked Carew, looking around. "A doss-house."

Carew looked towards Father Whitman inquiringly.

"You know what a doss-house is, I suppose?" went on the old man.

"Yes, of course. Does it belong to you?"

"I'm interested in it. Come in here."

They entered a fairly large room, in which at one end a good fire was burning. Around the room was scattered a number of cheap wooden chairs and tables. Carew thought the place looked clean, although a peculiarly offensive smell pervaded the building. A number of men were seated around talking and smoking. Some appeared in an advanced state of intoxication, others again were sober. All of them belonged to the lowest strata of society, and there were among them those whom one would not care to meet alone.

As Father Whitman and Carew entered there was a general glance in their direction. Several spoke to the old missionary, whilst others turned sullenly away from him without a word.

"This I claim to be the most respectable doss-house in London," remarked Father Whitman; "this and another."

"Do you mean that you don't get the worst characters here?"

"Oh! nothing of the sort. It's the cheapest place of its kind that I know of, and therefore we get those who are right down at the bottom. But it's conducted on right lines. No drinking or gambling is allowed here, and the beds are clean."

"You supervise it yourself?"

"In a way, yes. Holloa, Bill, you here again?"

"Yus, Farver Whitman, I ain't 'ad no luck."

"No? How's that?"

"I've tried everything, I 'ave, but I don't 'ave no luck. I've 'ired kids and sung 'Sife in the arms o' Jesus,' but I couldn't get nothink. I pulled open my jacket just to show I 'adn't got no shirt, and pretended as 'ow I was blind; but it weren't no go. I tried ter walk in the unemployed procession and they wouldn't 'ave me. I bought tipes and needles, and cotton an' things, but while I went to 'ave 'arf pint o' beer, some kids prigged my stock-in-tryde, they did."

This speech was interlarded with many expressive but unprintable expressions.

"Where's Sal?" asked Father Whitman.

"Oh! she's orf on 'er own, she is."

"Why don't you try to get work?"

"Not if I knows it, guvnor."

There was no pretence at either being honest or decent here. The men threw off all suggestion of honesty or good living. They were openly evil and not ashamed. They confessed that they would have stayed at the public-houses until closing-time, but they had been kicked out on account of not having money to spend. They boasted of the number of times they had been to prison, and showed not the slightest regret for the deeds which sent them there. The atmosphere reeked with filth. Here and there was a man who gave evidence of respectability, but these were very few.

One by one the men dropped in, in a more or less advanced state of intoxication. Ragged and poor as they were, nearly all of them had been able to secure drink by some means or another. They seemed to pay little heed to Carew; probably he was not the first well-dressed man who had visited the place. Some sat down by the fire and warmed themselves, while others made their way to their beds without remark.

Carew sat down near one man and tried to enter into conversation with him.

"You're an ink-slinger, I suppose," remarked the man presently.

"I am not quite sure of what you mean."

"Don't think you can kid me," said the man. "Well, you're welcome to make copy out of me, but I think its precious mean that you should make money out of me and never give me a bob."

"Oh, you take me for a journalist?"

"Yes: what for should you come here else? You are none of Father Whitman's sort. The grace of God never entered your heart."

"How do you know?"

"Know it! I've been too long in the gutter not to know. I can always tell when the love of God is in a man."

"How?"

"You can't know Father Whitman and not know. But I say, you'll get nothing out of me. That's your man there by the fire. He's given copy to many ink-slingers like you. Scholar, gentleman, and all the rest of it. That it's; go and speak to Lord Claude."

The man to whom he nodded looked up.

"Don't make so free with my name, Limbo," he said; "but if the gentleman would like a few words with me I shall be glad to be introduced."

Carew went to his side.

"You've been accustomed to something different from this," he said.

"Have I?" replied the man. "I don't see how you could know that except by my distaste for bad tobacco smoke."

"You like good tobacco smoke," said Carew, handing him a cigar.

"Flor de Cuba," said the man as he examined it. "Yes, it's a good brand, only I've known inferior cigars palmed off under a good-name."

"I think that's all right," said Carew; "try it."

The man lit the cigar, and smoked for a few seconds.

"It's very fair indeed," he said. "Personally, I think the quality of cigars a question for government inspection. I've always maintained that a bad cigar is a crime."

Carew laughed.

"I am always reminded of old Justice Inglewood in *Rob Roy* whenever I smoke," went on the man. "He moralized between every whiff, so do I."

"You are an admirer of the great Sir Walter," remarked Carew.

"In a qualified way," said the man pedantically. "Personally, I admire the younger school of fictionists more. I know this is literary heresy, but I admire Stevenson more. But there, *chacun à son gout*."

There was something irresistibly funny in the idea of this poor creature, filthy, ragged and penniless, in an East end doss-house, criticizing Sir Walter Scott and quoting French proverbs.

"Maybe you admire the older Scotchman most?" he went on.

"I've never considered it," replied Carew, "but your remarks are interesting."

"What I don't like about Sir Walter," went on the man, "is his pedantry. He is for ever dragging in rag-tags of Latin and French. Of course, it is refreshing to a man like myself, but what about his readers who have never enjoyed a classical education. Take a passage in *Waverley*, for example. He describes a man whose person might be improved by a plentiful application of spring water, with a *quantum sufficit* of soap. Now why drag in that bit of Latin?"

"Was it not an age of pedantry?" asked Carew.

"I grant you that," said the man judicially, "and Sir Walter was a lover of the classics. He knew his Horace and his Ovid well. That's one of my complaints concerning the younger romancers. They not only don't love the classics, but they don't know them. On the other hand, Stevenson was a stylist, and he loved his classics."

"Do you read the modern romancers much?" asked Carew.

"Very rarely now," replied the man. "I am one of those with a past. One of those

Qui port chapeau à plume  
Soulier à rouge talon,  
Qui joue de la flute  
Aussi de violon.  
Lon, lon, laridon.

Or at least I did; but those days are over now. It is true I think of them now and then, sometimes with regret."

"And what caused your change of fortune?" asked Carew.

"It would be easy to tell you a fairy story, wouldn't it?" answered the man. "Perhaps you'd believe it, eh?"

"Perhaps—perhaps not."

Lord Claude looked up at Carew questioningly, and as he did so the young man had a better sight of his face. He seemed about forty years of age, and while dissoluteness had set its marks upon his features, there were evidences of refinement. His hands, too, showed no signs of manual labour, while his clothes were of good material though ragged and dirty.

"Public school, Trinity College, Cambridge, that's my past," he said. "I had thought of the Church, but couldn't swallow the articles. I'm a bit of a sceptical philosopher myself or rather I was in those days. Then I turned my attention to the bar, but—well, it meant close application, and I was not sure of many briefs after I had eaten my dinners. It's not every genius who takes silk, as I daresay you know. So, well, I didn't turn out a reading man, and my pals were of the 'go as you please' order. Presently my moneyed friends died. I think they treated me shabbily. It is true they left me enough cash to establish myself in any profession, but they did not leave me a competence, so—well, did I hear you say you'd read Stevenson?"

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,  
Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum!  
Drink and the devil have done the rest,  
Yo ho ho, and a bottle of rum!

"That's in brief my history."

"But how do you live now?"

"Oh, there are many ways by which a man can keep the wolf from the door, that is, if a man is a scholar and a gentleman. It is true that the wolf has come pretty close sometimes, so near that I've smelt his breath and seen his fangs. I've been sunk so low as to be obliged to sell penny wonders."

"But surely an educated man like you could—could do something better."

"Doubtless there is something in what you say," he replied in judicial tones. "But not much. What could I do? If I could obtain what is called a character, I might swell the ranks of London clerks. And then? Nine till six every day, and Saturday afternoons free, with a fortnight

in the summer to go to Margate. Hardly a fascinating picture, eh? A creature who had to work to a time-table, an automaton, a respectable drudge. No, thank you. As for anything befitting a gentleman, the gate is shut. What does Dante say?

Poi fummo dentro al soglio della porta  
Che il malo amor dell' anime disusa,  
Perché fea parer dritta la via torta,  
Sonando la sentii esser richiusa :  
E s'io avessi gli occhi volti ad essa,  
Qual fora stata al fallo degna scusa ?

Or, to put it in English prose : ' The door is shut behind me, and I hear the clang of the thing. But what of that? A man's a man for a' that? I shall e'en live out my little day and go down into the dark.' "

" Honestly," said Carew, " what would you do if some one were to give you a new rig-out and a new start in life? "

" Ah, guv'nor, I'd be a new man," he said with a mocking whine. " I'd lead a new life, I would." "

" No, honestly and seriously," said Carew.

" Have you any intention of trying me? " asked the man.

" I do not say that, but I'm really curious." "

" You a Cambridge man? "

" No, Oxford." "

" Moral reformer? "

" Nothing of the sort." "

" Well, I'll tell you for the sake of this very smokeable cigar you've given me. If you gave me a new rig-out and fifty pounds to-morrow, I wouldn't stop boozing till that fifty pounds were gone. Mind, I might drink it like a gentleman; I hope I should. And when the money was gone, I'd sell the clothes to get more drink, and when they were gone, I'd steal to get more drink; and if my immortal soul were a saleable article, I'd sell that to get more drink. ' Now are you answered? ' as Shylock said to Bassanio." "

There was something almost devilish in his eyes as he spoke, and yet in a poor shuffling way he seemed to try and impress upon Carew the fact that he had been a gentleman.

" And are there many in these parts of your order? " asked Carew. " Are there many educated men who are in your position? "

"Good God, yes! And look here. I speak as one who knows. If you have any influence with reformers: if you are a friend of politicians, tell them this: Education as a reforming force is as ineffectual as the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. I can quote more moral platitudes by the score, and in half a dozen languages. So can many others whom you can find in twopenny doss-houses to-night, and what are we? Swill-tubs, who are content to be swill-tubs. I am not a religious man, but old Whitman has the root of the matter in him. A played-out fallacy we called it at Cambridge, but that old story of the Cross is the only thing which reforms men in these parts."

Carew looked at the man wonderingly. He did not know how much to discount. Was he in earnest or was he trying to laugh at him? Sometimes he talked like a serious man. Again he was pedantic mountebank, while at other times Carew felt sure that he was capable of the lowest devilry. One thing, however, seemed clear. The man's evident knowledge of learning had not kept him from being what he was, a bit of human refuse in an East End doss-house.

"Well, what did you think of Lord Claude?" asked Father Whitman presently.

"What do you know of him?" retorted Carew.

"The cleverest blackguard in London," replied Father Whitman.

"Your Gospel has not saved him."

"Not yet."

"But you think it will?"

"I am sure of it. I've seen more sides of him than you have, and I've not lost confidence. I'll tell you why. I've seen worse than he saved."

Presently they left the men's doss-house and found their way into a similar place set apart for women. The place for men had been sad enough, but this was worse. Carew was sickened at the sight of women, young women, sunk so low that they were lost to all modesty and decency. More than once he was on the point of telling Father Whitman that he must withdraw from his bargain, but a kind of sportsman's instinct forbad him. Besides, if he withdrew before he had fairly commenced it was a confession that Father Whitman was right and that he was wrong. No, he would go through with it, and even as he had talked with this wreckage and

refuse of society he found himself making plans for their reformation.

Before the night was over he and Father Whitman had selected four persons each. Carew felt as though he were in a kind of dream as he made the selection. It was more like a scene in a play than actual life, but his pocket-book revealed to him that he had been dealing with facts and not fancies. He had written down the names and particulars of two men and two women whom he undertook to reform. Each and all belonged to the lowest strata of East End life, and each and all belonged to that class which was the despair of political and social reformers. Father Whitman had also taken the names of a similar number of people whom Carew had selected from the strange medley of humanity whom they met that night.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CAREW AT WORK

It was in the small hours of the morning when Carew arrived at his flat. But he did not go straight to bed. He knew he could not sleep if he went. The thing he had arranged to do haunted him like a nightmare. He took out his pocket-book and read the following entries :

"Ikey Schmidt, German Jew. Practically an atheist. Has been in prison several times. Drunkard, thief, vagrant. Reared in the slums. Parents a bad lot. Sleeps mostly at Whitman's Doss-House."

"Dick Barker, known as the Bruiser. Bad lot. Has been imprisoned for theft and burglary. Will not work. Very ignorant. The product of generations of vice. Sleeps where he can."

"Nell Harkwright. Was a sewing girl. Went wrong. Drinks hard. No sense of decency or modesty. Companions of the lowest order. Police say she's irreclaimable."

"Sally-in-our-Alley. If possible, worse than Nell Harkwright. No known parentage. Sells penny trinkets sometimes, but in the main gets her living by vice.Laughs at the mention of anything good. Said to be hopeless."

"It's a nice list," laughed Carew, as he read. "What a lunatic I must be to allow myself to be dragged into such a business !"

He lay back in his armchair, and thought long and carefully.

"I must work out my scheme carefully," he said presently, "and I must make a large net. If I simply concentrate on these four I shall only set them against me. Let me think now. My best plan will be to arrange for two clubs, one for men and another for women. These places shall be open all the time. I'll arrange to have classes in them—carpentry and metal-working and wood-carving classes for the men, and singing and dancing classes for the girls. Yes, that sounds all right. It'll cost a lot of money, but I don't mind that. Now I'm in for it, I may as well do it thoroughly.

"Shall I allow drinking in these clubs? I think so. I shall utterly fail if I don't allow them their beer. But the amount must be strictly limited. I am afraid also that I shall have to live on the spot.

"But all this must be only to lead them to desire a respectable life. I shall therefore have to see to it that all the people I'm interested in shall have good, steady work. After all, it should not be so difficult. I'll see that they are surrounded by refining influences. I'll get people down to talk to them and sing to them, and I'll think of a lot of interesting games for them to learn. Yes, that's essential. By Jove! it seems to be working out very well."

Presently a difficulty arose which he had not considered.

"I can get on all right with the men," he said, "but how about the women? If I am to have a club for women, there must be somebody at the head of it, and that somebody must be a lady. She must be a refined, cultured, lovable woman. Ah, if only Joan would superintend that part of the work! But she won't; she's already working for Father Whitman. Besides, I'm to have non-religious workers. That makes the problem more difficult."

"I can't think any more to-night," he went on presently. "I'm too tired; besides, the experiences of the last twelve hours are confusing. My word, what a sight it was! Fancy that Lord Claude, as they call him, a man educated at a public school and a University, a man quoting Ovid, Socrates, Dante and Shakespeare, and yet a thing who wallows in a cesspool of vice! I couldn't have believed it unless I had seen him. What a mountebank he was! And yet there were gleams of sense in his conversation. I wonder what his real name is, and whether there is any truth in his story?"

During the next few days Carew spent the whole of his time in the East End. He visited several workmen's clubs and institutions which existed for the benefit of the people. He made many inquiries as to their cost, and as to the methods which were used. As he went from place to place, he was simply astonished at the agencies which were in operation for the betterment of the people. Almost every church, chapel and mission hall was a centre not only of religious influence, but of social service. He visited long-established "Halls" and University Settlements, and had long talks with the workers, and his visits gave him food for reflection. He realized that, almost without exception, these institutions were worked by people whose inspiration was the Man upon whose cross he had trampled. Practically no other voluntary agency existed. On every hand the same fact reached him. But for Christ, the hundreds of beneficent agencies which exercised the main uplifting influences of the East End of London would cease in a day.

He saw that it was not simply a matter of whether people could be reformed by other means than by Jesus Christ; the thing went further back. The workers, those who gave their lives to uplift the fallen, would never have given themselves to the work but for Christ. This fact forced itself upon him at every turn of his enquiry. Every mission hall and practically every club which existed for the uplifting of the people was built by money that had been contributed by Christians. He remembered his experience in Mohammedan countries, he called to mind the work which was done in them for the reclamation of the fallen. Yes, there was charity; he could not help admitting that; in fact, large numbers of the people lived by begging; but he could not remember the existence of any such institutions as existed in the East End of London. The Mohammedan world did not contribute such self-sacrificing workers as those which were every day to be seen in the darkest spots in Whitechapel and Poplar and Bethnal Green. Everything that was done for the welfare of the people could be traced to the Christ upon whose cross he had trampled.

He saw all this plainly, and yet he had no faith. He felt sure that everything could be explained by purely natural means, and he would demonstrate the fact to the world.

After many days of careful study and investigation,

Carew rented two fairly large houses, which he arranged to fit up as clubs. He spared no expense in the furniture, or in obtaining means for the amusement and recreation of those who were to be members. For the men's club he bought a small billiard table, two bagatelle tables, and boards for chess and draughts. He also arranged for a liberal supply of illustrated and daily papers, and saw to it that the club-rooms should be well warmed and lit. For the women's club, also, he was just as careful in his plans, but he keenly felt his lack of experience.

"Whitman has all the advantages over me," he reflected. "He has long years of experience behind him, and he thoroughly knows the class of people among whom he works. Still, I must not forget that in some things I have the pull over him. I am what is called an educated man, and I have no need to stint for money. On the other hand, again, he has a number of willing workers—refined and educated ladies, who have given up their homes and their friends to come and labour in the slums. Well, if he can obtain them, why not I? The only stipulation which has been made in this direction is that my workers shall not believe in the Christian religion."

While the club-rooms were being prepared, Carew returned to his flat and mingled freely in Society. He knew many ladies who belonged to what is called the advanced school of thinkers, who, he thought, might help him. They had discarded the Christian religion as a beautiful fairy story, but still they professed to be very strong in their social sympathies. Two he knew who spoke strongly at public meetings on the question of women suffrage, and who had expressed themselves as in deep sympathy with the sad condition of their unfortunate sisters. He hoped that among such he would be able to get helpers.

He was delighted, therefore, when one evening he found himself sitting beside a lady who was a profound rationalist, and who was also interested in social reform.

"What is this I have been hearing about you?" she asked.

"Nothing terrible, Mrs. Kenneth, I hope," he said.

Mrs. Kenneth was a widow of independent means and without encumbrances.

"No, but quite otherwise. It is quite refreshing to hear of a young man, who had the courage to renounce the

Christian religion, who still has the welfare of the people at heart."

"Why, is there anything wonderful about that?"

"Well, I am afraid that such cases as yours are not common; but come, tell me about it."

"About what?"

"About your scheme for saving the East End."

"There is nothing so ambitious as that."

"But I heard that you had started a mission on purely rationalistic lines. That you determined to prove that as good results could be produced without Christianity as has been produced with it. Delightful, Mr. Carew, delightful. As you know, the taunt which these Christian people have always thrown in our faces is that they sacrifice themselves for the 'submerged tenth,' while we rationalists do nothing. That is why your scheme is so delightful."

"Why, have rationalistic missions never been started?"

"Oh, yes; but to be quite candid, they have not lasted."

"By the way," said Carew, "I am awfully in need of a few ladies who will go down there and live and work. My agreement with Whitman is that none of my workers shall believe in the Christian religion, and it struck me that you who are interested in that class might come and help me."

"Certainly I will. What do you want me to do?"

"Well, I want some two or three ladies to go down and live at the girls' club. If I could get four, they could live there two at a time, a month alternately. They could study the girls' lives, assist them in their amusements, be kind to them—in short, well, they could reclaim them. Of course I should want them to give special attention to the two whose names I have here. Nell Harkwright, and the other who is known as Sally-in-our-Alley. You would be just the one to superintend such a place. You have discarded the Christian religion, you are rich, and you are not encumbered in any way."

For a minute there was an awkward silence, then Mrs. Kenneth said: "I am awfully sorry, but I am afraid I could not do that. I would come down some night and talk to your girls with pleasure, but you see—well, my aims and sympathies are political. I have engagements to speak at several large meetings up and down the country and—well, you can see how impossible it is, can't you? So sorry. And

then Mrs. Kenneth found herself eager to speak with some one else.

Day by day the work went on at the clubhouses, and Carew surveyed them with pleasure. The rooms looked neat and cosy and attractive. But he wanted helpers. He had discovered from talking with those who had given years of their lives to the reclamation of the people, that nothing but continuous and assiduous service would avail. Intermittent efforts did not count for much. Those who were successful in uplifting these people really lived among them. So far, however, he had not been able to obtain such service either among men or women. Not a single man he knew offered to live with him in the rooms which he had furnished, in order that men might be helped; not a single lady had volunteered her services.

"Well, how are you getting on?" said Mrs. Kenneth, some week or two after the conversation we have recorded,

"The club-rooms are practically ready," said Carew, "but as yet I have not succeeded in getting helpers. I've tried to get people to give me a night a week, and that sort of thing, but so far I've failed."

"Of course, one of your conditions was that you were to have no Christians working with you," said Mrs. Kenneth.

"Yes, that was expressly stipulated. And really, when one comes to think of it, it's right. Not only should the work be uninfluenced by Christianity with regard to its teaching, but the workers should be non-Christian."

"Of course, everything is influenced by Christianity in this country," said Mrs. Kenneth reflectively.

"I suppose it is in a way. Still, I must play the game fairly."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Mrs. Kenneth.

"What?"

"Advertise."

"I'd never thought of that," remarked Carew.

"The Christian Missions have their paid assistants, and seeing there are only a few people like Joan Winscombe who are sufficiently Quixotic to leave their pleasures for this kind of work, advertise, and offer a salary."

"Good," said Carew, "that's a splendid idea."

"And make your ideas perfectly clear. Make it understood that Christians are not eligible. State that your work

is to be done in a rationalistic, sensible way, and must be done by rationalistic, sensible people. Offer a good salary, and you'll have numbers of applications. By the way, I repeat my offer to come down and talk to the girls when your club is started."

"Thank you," said Carew ; and when he reached his flat that night he sat down and prepared to draw up his advertisement.

## CHAPTER XX

### CAREW'S MISSION WORK

"WANTED, Lady Superintendent for Girls' Club in the East End of London. Must be deeply interested in——"

Carew stopped. The advertisement was not so easy to write as he had thought. Presently he threw down his pen with a laugh.

"I don't know how to frame it," he said, aloud. "Whitman will probably read it, and I must let him see that I intend playing the game."

Must be deeply interested in the welfare of the lower classes, and disposed to devote her whole energies to the social and moral elevation of her unfortunate sisters. No applicant must be a believer in Christianity.

He read the last sentence again and again. He did not like it, and yet he did not know how to express his thought better. But it would not do. It sounded blatant, and, although he scarcely knew why, was out of harmony with his feelings.

Wanted, for a Girls' Club, conducted on purely rationalistic and humane lines, a Lady Superintendent who is deeply interested in the social and moral elevation of her unfortunate sisters. Apply in person, between the hours of ten and twelve, at 15, Binker's Lane, Whitechapel.

"There, that will do," he said presently. "It is not quite so offensive as the first, and yet it conveys my meaning. I must also draw up a similar advertisement for men to help me in my men's club, and tell applicants to come between three and five in the afternoon."

A few minutes later he had sent his effusions to three of the leading daily papers, and then started for Binker's Lane to see that all was in order.

The next day he was at the girls' club at half-past nine, and before ten o'clock he was informed that a number of applicants awaited him in the room adjoining. He had engaged a youth to act as a kind of secretary, and this youth was his informant on the present occasion.

"They're a motley crowd, sir," said Bassett, which was the youth's name.

"Are any of them suitable, do you think?" Carew asked almost nervously.

"One or two of them seem all right, sir, but as a whole they are not very promising."

"Well, show them in one by one," said the young man with a sigh.

At the end of two hours, Carew was well-nigh in despair. The main bulk of the applicants were utterly impossible. Coarse, vulgar, incapable women who thought only of a liberal salary and plenty of leisure. It is true there were three who struck him as being entirely suitable, but when he came to the religious question he found a difficulty.

"You will have noticed in the advertisement," he said, "that the club is to be conducted on purely rationalistic and humane lines. Do you understand by that, that I do not wish the question of religion to be introduced?"

"I was rather in doubt as to what you meant by rationalistic" replied one of the suitable applicants, "and I concluded that you meant sensible, rational."

"That is just what I do mean," replied Carew. "That is to say, religion is not to be introduced; in fact the lady superintendent must not believe in religion."

"I am afraid I shall not suit, sir," replied the applicant. "I trust I am a Christian woman, and what is more, I would not pretend to try and elevate fallen girls socially and morally without the aid of religion."

Indeed this was Carew's difficulty. He could not trust those who did not believe in Christianity, while those who seemed suitable for his purpose were believers. But for his arrangement with Father Whitman, he would have engaged one of these, of course on the understanding that no religious

teaching was to be given, but his bargain was, that he should use none but unreligious workers.

At length, however, he made his selection. He chose a widowed lady, whose husband had been a pronounced atheist, and who had been a kind of leader among working men. This lady was strongly antagonistic to Christianity and had on many occasions spoken at public meetings. Mrs. Simpson, for that was her name, fancied herself to be the natural successor of Annie Besant, as an exponent of materialistic philosophy. Indeed, she said as much to Carew.

"It was a great grief to me, Mr. Carew," she said, "when Mrs. Besant forsook the flag and became mixed up with that theosophical nonsense. I felt then, as I feel now, that some one ought to take up the work she laid down. And what I can do, I shall do. As Mr. Bradlaugh used to say, 'this upas tree of religion must be destroyed root and branch.'"

Carew engaged Mrs. Simpson at a liberal salary. He gave her the names and particulars of the two girls to whom she must give special attention, and he authorized her to engage another woman as her helper.

That same afternoon, moreover, he employed a young fellow to work with him in the men's club. George Gibbins satisfied him entirely. He was a young fellow who had worked in the East End all his life, and knew the district thoroughly. He had, at the cost of great self-sacrifice, educated himself, was a lifelong teetotaller and bore a blameless character. Moreover, George was a young man with ideas. He had spoken at the dock-gates on necessary political reforms, and was a great advocate of the nationalization of railways, land, houses and capital. "It is only by this means that we shall elevate the people and destroy the slums," he had said again and again. "Take away the temptation to do wrong, and you'll do more to make the people moral than by all this tub-thumping gospel rot." Indeed, George had political ambition, and often dreamed of the time when he would have a seat in the House of Commons.

At the end of a week after Carew's advertisement had appeared, the two clubs were in full swing. A number of men and girls had been gathered into them, and, what pleased Carew more than anything else, those whose moral

reform he had declared he would bring about had been induced to join.

Indeed, Carew felt like rubbing his hands with glee. His clubs, as far as he could judge, were an assured success. The billiard and bagatelle tables were in constant use; ping-pong, draughts, bridge and dominoes were all exceedingly popular, and each evening 15, Binker's Lane, was the scene of laughter and revelry. He was careful, too, to devote his attention to finding work for his protégés. His bargain with Father Whitman was that these people should be made steady, industrious and respectable people by purely rational means; therefore he must see to it that habits of thrift and industry should be inculcated.

Several of his friends from the West of London visited his clubs. Some sang, others recited, while others gave addresses on various subjects, all of which Carew felt sure would have a tendency to give the people a longing for things that were good and true and beautiful.

At the end of a month he was not quite so jubilant, but still he was hopeful. Mrs. Simpson had told him that the girl known as "Sally-in-our-Alley" had refused to do the work which was found for her, and, what was more and worse, had refused to come to the club, asserting as her reason that she preferred going to a pub., where she could "ave a good booze, and no bones be made about it."

Still, Carew reflected that a girl like Sally could not be made a saint in a day, and as Nell Harkwright had shown a better disposition he was not disposed to despair.

In the men's club matters were progressing favourably, but not quite on the lines he hoped. Those who came regularly were of the more respectable order, but men of the class he had met in Father Whitman's doss-house seemed to find no pleasure in coming. Indeed, the respectable working men resented the appearance of what they called "walking swill-tubs," and gave it out as their intention to resign their membership, "unless the plyce was kep' respectable like."

Still Carew thought he saw signs of improvement in the two men he had bargained to reform, and was therefore disposed to regard the outlook as a cheerful one. Besides, he had great confidence in George Gibbins, and George assured him that all would be well.

"Workin' men are not angels," he remarked, "but they are sound at heart. Besides, reformation can't be expected in a day. We must keep on 'ammerin' away, you know, sir. I've always maintained, and I stand by it, that if you give the poor man a chance, he'll prove worthy of it. And that's what we're doin' you know, sir."

On two occasions Carew paid visits to Father Whitman, but he found the old man rather chary of giving information; especially was this true on his second visit. "We agreed to try this job for a year, Mr. Carew," said the old missionary, "and not to try and report progress until the end of six months. When that time comes, I shall be ready to tell you how things have gone with me. And I shall have a good report too."

"Indeed," said Carew. "Of course you are not in the same position that I am. You are a practised hand in dealing with these people, while I am utterly inexperienced. All the same it baffles me to see how you know you will have a good report."

"The Lord has never disappointed me yet," replied the old man.

"Is Miss Winscombe with you," asked Carew.

"No, she's gone."

"What, for good?"

"Oh, no. She'll be back again presently. Of course, she has other duties. Naturally, she can't be always away from her father. I hear that Sir Richard has not been over well since his return from the East, and that the doctor has ordered him to go to the South of France. I believe Miss Winscombe has gone with him. Besides—well, you are a friend of hers, and so I don't think I shall be betraying any secrets, but I have my suspicions that she has a serious matter which she wants to consider."

Carew looked at him eagerly. "Nothing wrong, I hope?" he said.

"Oh, no," said Father Whitman, with a laugh, "only—well, you've met young Mr. Trengrove, I think."

"Yes," said Carew; and his heart sank as he spoke.

"Well, I may be wrong, but I fancy Mr. Trengrove has made a proposal to her."

"And—and do you think it is likely she will accept?" asked Carew as calmly as he was able.

It did not strike him until afterwards how incongruous it was that he, Bamfield Carew, should ask an uneducated city missionary to give him information concerning Miss Joan Winscombe's matrimonial arrangements.

"I know nothing," said Father Whitman; "I only guess. I keep my eyes open, and I am sure that Mr. Trengrove—well, it's hardly fair to say more, is it? I am inclined to think he has asked her to marry him, and that she is considering it."

"But surely," said Carew, "Miss Winscombe could not seriously consider an offer of marriage from a man in Trengrove's position. He is now a paid worker in a university settlement, and, if I understand aright, is preparing to take some East End church."

"Well, sir, and what could be more suitable? Miss Winscombe is eminently suitable for a minister's wife. Her heart is in such work as his, and I've never had a nobler helper. As for Mr. Trengrove, he's one of the finest fellows I ever met. He took all sorts of honours at Cambridge, and might have done anything he liked; but he elected to come and work among the outcasts in this part of London. And a grand work he's done, too. Personally I hope she'll accept him."

"You say she's gone to the South of France?"

"Yes, as I told you the doctor ordered Sir Richard to go."

When Carew returned to Binker's Lane, it seemed to him that he had lost a great deal of interest in his work. While he fancied that Joan Winscombe was near him, everything was different, but now he knew she had gone, much of the meaning of his work had gone too. Never until then had he realized how sordid and squalid and uninviting Binker's Lane and the district were. Besides, Father Whitman's news made him terribly downhearted. He felt sure, when he had seen Trengrove at first, that he loved Joan Winscombe, but he had never seriously reflected that Joan could ever return his affections. Now, however, it seemed within the range of possibility. Undoubtedly Trengrove was a gentleman; undoubtedly, too, he was a fine fellow, while he and Joan were in complete sympathy with regard to the former's work. Trengrove was not only a Christian, but he was a militant Christian. Might not Joan, who had

voluntarily given much of her time to help Father Whitman, consent to become the wife of this young minister?

The thought maddened him. When he came to analyse his feelings he realized that one of the strongest motives he had in coming to work in Binker's Lane district was to justify himself in the eyes of Joan Winscombe. He realized, too, that life would be a great Sahara without her. How could he stay and work among those sordid, foul-minded men and women, while Joan Winscombe was probably deciding to marry Trengrove?

Besides, he was neglecting the book he had arranged to write. Ought he not to go away somewhere and finish it? He could not do so in London, and certainly the weather in the East End was shocking. Why could he not go to the South of France?

He went into the club-room, where a number of men had gathered. Among them was George Gibbins, the social democrat and would-be labour-leader. What could he do better than leave the work for the men entirely in George's hands? George knew the men, he was interested in them, he believed in them, and it was to George's interests to make the club successful. George had heard of Carew's bargain with Father Whitman, and George was as keenly anxious as Carew himself to demonstrate the fact that the working man could be uplifted without what he called "the interference of sky pilots."

"Gibbins," said Carew, "I fancy I shall have to go away for a few weeks. I am sure I can safely leave everything in your hands."

"Certainly, sir. Do you know I've got hold of Ikey Schmidt and Dick Barker again, and I've got 'em both to promise to turn over a new leaf. They've been on the booze, and I've had all sorts of trouble with them, but they promised me to-day that if I'd give them another chance they'd begin fair straight again."

"That's right," said Carew. "I depend entirely on you, Gibbins, and I want you to bestow special attention on those men. I'd give a hundred pounds towards getting you into Parliament if you can make those men into sober, respectable, industrious citizens."

"Right, sir, you'll find me coming to you for the money. You go away for a few weeks, sir; you ain't accustomed to

this kind of work, and you need a rest. Mrs. Simpson and I'll carry on everything here like clockwork."

Carew had made up his mind to leave England even before he had seen Mrs. Simpson, nevertheless he had a long talk with her about the work.

"The difficulty is the class distinctions which exist among these people," said Mrs. Simpson. "The respectable girls don't like being seen with those like Sally-in-our-Alley. I tell them straight that they are not true Radicals nor Democrats."

"How is Sally getting on?" asked Carew.

"Slow work, sir. She's got drink in her blood, that's what Sally has. Besides, she got no moral ambition. She don't want to be a good girl. She don't find no pleasure in respectable ways. As for Nell Harkwright, she's just as bad. She promised to come to the club last night, but she never came. I've just heard that she and a lot of chaps and girls was seen coming out of the *Green Man* last night at closing time, and they were all as drunk as they could stand."

"Nothing but loving, womanly sympathy will save such as they," said Carew. "You must not give them up, Mrs. Simpson."

"I'll have another try, Mr. Carew, although I often think that nothing but a reformatory will do either Sally or Nell any good. Perhaps, if the Salvation Army or Father Whitman could get hold of them they might——"

"But we don't believe in any religious nonsense," said Carew.

"Oh, no, sir, of course not; all the same—well, they have done some wonderful things. But our work is slower, sir, slower."

The next day Carew returned to the West End, having left George Gibbins and Mrs. Simpson in complete charge of two clubs. He was not long in discovering that Father Whitman's news was quite correct, and that Sir Richard Winscombe and Joan had gone to Cannes, where they intended to stay for some weeks.

"I think she might have told me before she went," said Carew to himself. "Yet why should she? She regards me with very scant favour, I am afraid, and she doesn't know that—great God, how I love her!"

Two days later he was seated in the boat train for Dover, having taken a ticket for Cannes.

"At any rate, I'll know my fate," he said, as the train swept on. "If Trengrove wins her he shall not do so without a struggle on my part. My word, what a fool I was to alienate her sympathies from me by that cross fiasco!"

The following day he arrived at Cannes. When he left England, London lay in a cold, damp mist, but here the sun was shining brightly. The air was warm, the golden oranges gleamed from among the dark leaves, while the palm trees gave the town quite an Oriental appearance.

No sooner did he arrive at his hotel than he eagerly scanned the list of visitors which was given in the newspapers. Presently his heart gave a leap. Among the visitors staying at *Beau Site* he saw the names of Sir Richard Winscombe and Miss Winscombe.

"I'll see her to-night, and I'll tell her all that is in my heart," he said.

He sat down at the dinner table at his own hotel, but he refused nearly every dish that was presented to him, and scarcely was dinner over than he put on a light overcoat and walked towards the *Beau Site*.

"They will have finished their coffee by the time I get there," he said, "and Sir Richard will have either gone to the smoking-room or his own private room to smoke his cigar. Perhaps I shall have a chance of seeing Joan alone."

A few minutes later he had sent his card to Miss Joan Winscombe, and the waiter had asked him to follow him into Sir Richard's private apartments.

## CHAPTER XXI

### CAREW'S WOOING

To Carew's great joy he found Joan sitting alone. She rose and greeted him cordially, although she was evidently surprised to see him.

"I was sorry to hear that Sir Richard was not well," said Carew. "I hope there is nothing serious."

"He's had a nervous breakdown," replied Joan. "In fact, I do not think he has ever quite recovered from the shock he received in Tel Moloch. I thought that amidst his books and inscriptions he would forget all about it; but he hasn't. Besides, the winter has been very trying in London."

"Yes, we've had plenty of fogs," said Carew, "and London fogs are not exhilarating."

"I felt condemned for leaving him so much," said Joan, "but he insisted on my giving occasional help to Father Whitman as usual."

"Your father sympathizes with your visits to the East End?" suggested Carew.

"Entirely. He has a great admiration for Father Whitman. He believes in him thoroughly. Indeed, no one who knows the old man can help believing in him. Besides, my father has investigated the results of his work. It is not generally known, but Father Whitman's work has a peculiar interest for my father."

Carew was silent.

"And how are you getting on with your clubs, Mr. Carew?" went on Joan.

"Oh! I've found splendid supporters. Both George Gibbins and Mrs. Simpson know that class of people thoroughly, and I felt I could safely leave everything in their hands."

For a moment there was an awkward silence.

"I am afraid that even if I could not have trusted them I should have left them," he blurted out presently.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"You see," he went on—"well, it's no use hiding it, but I could not stay in London."

"No?"

"No. How could I?"

"I am afraid I do not understand."

"I suppose not. Miss Winscombe, I suppose you despise me, don't you? No, do not try to answer me; I am afraid I understand your feelings too well. And yet when I knew you were in Cannes, I came here as fast as the train could bring me. Can you guess why?"

He started to his feet and looked for a moment out of the window, as though he were fascinated by the gaily-lit gardens, and the sound of the music which he heard in the distance.

"I'm afraid I have come here on a hopeless quest," he went on, as he returned to her side; "nevertheless, I hope you will listen to me patiently for a few minutes. I don't think we got on very well when we were in Jerusalem. I fancied you did not like me, and as a consequence I am afraid I did not appear to you in a very attractive guise. A man is always at his worst when he thinks he is not liked. Besides, I resented what I thought was your dislike, because I believed you were influenced by my—well, irreligious views. You know what happened afterwards. I trampled upon a sacred symbol, and to save my life pretended to accept the teachings of the Koran."

He gave her a quick, hurried glance as he spoke, but he could not see her face; she was looking steadily on the carpet.

"Whatever else may be said about that—that episode," he went on, "it had the appearance of saving both your father's life and my own. Whether the means justified the end I don't know. Your father got back to Jerusalem while I spent some weeks in the desert. While there I had some curious experiences. I learnt a great many things about the wonderful mosque, I saw something of the aims and ideals and life of the Arabs, and I was instructed in the mysteries of the Koran. And more, many attempts were

made to persuade me to settle down among these people. An old Sheikh, believing me to be very rich, offered me his daughter in marriage. Of course it seems laughable, but be that as it may, the old Sheikh's proposal made me realize what I had not realized before. I knew then that I loved you; and from that moment I planned to hurry back to England. How I escaped I need not tell you now; but escape I did, thinking all the while how I might destroy your prejudices against me and win you as my wife.

"I will not enlarge upon what has happened since; but a few nights ago, when talking with Father Whitman, I heard what made it impossible for me to stay in London. He said he was not sure, but he had reason for believing that you were considering an offer of marriage, and I—well, I came here to plead my cause. I love you, Miss Winscombe, and life without your love will be a mockery to me. Can you give me a word of hope?"

"No."

She spoke very quietly, but he heard her reply quite plainly, and it sounded like a death-knell in his heart.

"Won't you take time to consider, Miss Winscombe?" he urged presently. He spoke steadily, but Joan knew by the tones of his voice how deeply he was moved. "I have come to you hurriedly, unexpectedly, and—and naturally you may have been taken by surprise. It means so much to me, you cannot think how much. You are everything in the world to me. You are not engaged to anyone else, are you?"

"No."

Her answer relieved his mind inexpressibly, and it gave him a suggestion of hope.

"Then can you give me no word of hope?" he urged. She shook her head.

"Is it because of—of what happened at Tel Moloch?" he asked, and there was a tone of bitterness in his voice.

She was silent for a few seconds before she replied.

"I am afraid I cannot give you my reasons," she said, "but I think you can see, even if there were nothing else, that that would be sufficient to make your proposal impossible to accept. The very thought of it is horrible to me. It places us in two different worlds. There is a great gulf between us which nothing can bridge."

"Nothing?"

"No."

"But when there was no thought of sacrilege in my mind—when it meant nothing to me?"

He knew he was uttering vain words, yet he could not help speaking.

"That very fact removes us still further from each other," she said.

"Does such an act mean so much to you?"

"What the act signifies does. The bits of wood mean nothing, but the truth behind does. It means everything to me."

"But my love to you is not altered by all that. It happened months ago—it seems years. It has nothing whatever to do with the love I bear you. I would not interfere with your religion; I would respect it—I do respect it. How can I help doing so when I remember the work it leads you to do? Besides, I love you—love you like my own life. I would give my life to make you happy."

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Carew," she said. "I never dreamed that you entertained such feelings for me, and the purpose of your visit is a great surprise. All the same, I can give you no other answer."

"If—if"—he hesitated for a moment, and then went on—"if the religious difficulty could be removed?" he said.

She looked at him almost eagerly. "Have you been convinced?" she said. "Have facts convinced you that the symbol upon which you trampled——"

"No, no," he said, shaking his head. "Perhaps I ought not to have made the suggestion. It escaped from me without thought. No, I am not convinced; I do not think I ever shall be. I have thought, and read, and examined evidences, and I am not convinced. But surely I can be honest, sincere—aye, even reverent, without faith? Can you not believe that? Won't you let the matter remain undecided for a few weeks, Miss Winscombe? Oh, if you only knew how I loved you!"

"I think it best for us to end this interview, Mr. Carew," she said; "but let me first say this. You ask me if I do not think you can be honest, sincere, and reverent, without faith. I believe you are all that. Moreover, now I know you better, I am sure I did you an injustice in my thoughts. But what

you ask is impossible. Impossible for many reasons ; but even if there were no other reason than that which we have discussed, it would be sufficient."

"This is my dismissal, then ?" he said.

She was silent.

"You forbid my ever speaking to you again ?"

"It would only give pain to us both."

"But answer me this. If—if that fiasco at Tel Moloch, with all that it means, did not stand between us, would there——"

"I cannot answer that, Mr. Carew."

When he left, Joan walked with him to the gates of the garden of *Beau Site Hotel*. The night was gloriously fine. The heavens were star-bespangled, and although spring was yet early, the air was warm and sweet-scented. In front of them stretched one of the most beautiful towns in the world, while beyond, the sea spread her broad bosom to the skies. It was a night not easily forgotten, and Bamfield Carew standing by the side of the woman he loved, felt its power.

"We shall see you again during your stay in Cannes ?" she said.

"I think not."

"Good-bye, then," she said, holding out her hand.

"I would like to see you often ; I would like to be at your side always," he cried. "But what is the use ? The gates of such happiness are shut against me. I am a pariah ; I cannot repeat your shibboleth."

"Good-bye, Mr. Carew," she repeated.

"Don't cast me off," he pleaded. "Don't send me away hopeless. What though I am an unbeliever ? Better be honest about one's unbelief than to profess a faith which has no reality. Say I may speak to you again in six months, or a year."

She shook her head.

"My case is hopeless, then ?"

She did not reply.

"Suspend judgment for a few months," he urged. "Try and consider my appeal again. Never did a man love more fervently, more truly than I love you. I may not believe as you believe ; but I would not interfere with your faith. I admire what you have done for Father Whitman ; I—I

believe in a great deal of it. Believe me, although I am without faith, I am no fast man about town, no *roué*. I reverence all things honest and good, and—and I love you like my own life. Say you do not refuse me utterly.”

“I cannot promise you anything,” she said hurriedly. “Good-night. Perhaps I shall see you again in—White-chapel.”

She went back to the hotel while Carew stood alone. No word of hope had been spoken, and as he felt himself alone, much of the beauty of the night had seemed to depart, and yet he was not utterly sad. He still felt the warm touch of her hand, the sound of her voice was in his ears. The words she spoke seemed to forbid all hope, and yet hope was not dead in his heart. Why was it? Was there something in the tones of her voice that gave him hope, was there a faint emphasis on the word “promise”? He tried to think so, and although he could not make himself believe there was, the very thought made him less sad.

The next day he left Cannes for Monte Carlo. “I cannot stay in Cannes and not try and see her,” he reflected; “and if I see her I shall only feed a hopeless passion. I will go to Monte Carlo and try and forget. I have seen little but squalor and fogs these last few months. I will have a little excitement now, and I’ll spend a week or two in the brightest and most beautiful spot in Europe.”

## CHAPTER XXII

### MONTE CARLO

No one paid any heed to him in the gorgeous gaming saloon. Hundreds were present, but he was as much alone as if he were in Central Africa. He could not see a face that he knew. A few like himself looked on without playing, but nearly all present were seated around various tables, and placing their money on certain numbers marked upon them. The croupiers who raked in the coins after each whirl of the little instrument placed at the centre of each table, looked on calmly as if perfectly unmoved by what was going on around them. Sometimes they yawned. What did it matter to them whether this giddy crowd gained or lost their money? But not so the players themselves. They watched the course of the little instrument as though it were a matter of life and death as to where and when it stopped. If it stopped at thirteen it might mean ruin; if it went on to eighteen it might mean fortune.

As he looked he fell to philosophizing on the play. Regarded from one standpoint, it seemed childish in the extreme. A little bit of machinery was set in motion, and presently a little pointer rested opposite a certain figure. That was all. Apparently there was no skill, and as far as he could judge everything was done perfectly fairly and above board. It was purely a matter of chance whether the pointer stopped at twelve or fourteen. No one could tell when the machinery was set in motion. It was a game which any imbecile could play. It required nether skill nor memory nor judgment. As far as he could judge, the chances of winning were at least three to two in favour of the table. From the fact that the bank made hundreds of thousands every year, this was, of course, the case; still,

Chance was a fickle jade, and so the players might occasionally win. That was what drew them together. Not one present would remain at the tables five minutes but for the fact of the stakes. They did not play for the game itself, simply because it was not worthy of being called a game; it was pure gambling. There was no sportsmanship about it, there was no thought of playing for a side, or displaying skill, no thought of playing a game well. All was chance. If the pointer stopped at the number you chose to put your money on, you won, if not you lost, and that was all.

And yet the people were interested, nay, more, they were excited. The air was hot and fetid, the atmosphere was electric. Men and women risked their money, and in that risk lay everything.

It is true Monte Carlo is a beautiful place, and offers natural beauties difficult to rival. Behind the great Casino lay the gay town, and beyond the town the mountains lifted their rocky peaks into the sky. Flowers bloomed everywhere, music filled the air, the blue sea rippled on the shore hundreds of feet down. But it was not for beautiful scenery or healthy surroundings that men and women came to Monte Carlo; it was for excitement. And the excitement lay in risk, in hazard.

Carew went from table to table, watching. No one asked him to play. Indeed, every seat was so fully occupied that he would have found a difficulty in playing even though he desired. He was not a stranger to Monte Carlo, and he had visited the tables before; but the experiences of the last few months made him thoughtful. In spite of the excitement, in spite of the fact that large sums of money were made and lost in a minute, the place seemed squalid, sordid, poverty-stricken. This was the life which thousands craved for; this was one of the great centres of fashionable society. Men and women bearing the best-known names in Europe were doubtless under that roof at that very moment. These people probably pitied the toilers, the sowers, the reapers of the world; they were the pleasure-seekers. This was the life which many desired.

"Hello, Carew! What are you doing here?"

"Just watching."

"Not playing?"

"No."

"When did you come?"

"Only to-day."

"I've been here a fortnight."

The man who spoke to him was an old Oxford acquaintance. His name was Graham, and he was a man for whom Carew had a great deal of respect.

"It's more than a year since I saw you," went on Graham. "What have you been doing?"

"I've been travelling in the East among other things."

"Oh, yes; I heard about that."

Graham looked at his watch. "It's half-past four," he said; "let's get a cup of tea somewhere."

They left the Casino, and presently found themselves seated under a broad balcony which overlooked the Mediterranean.

"By the way," said Graham, presently, "what is the truth about—that is, what you did in Palestine, or Syria, when you were with Sir Richard Winscombe?"

"I was a cad, that's all," replied Carew, almost bitterly. The words slipped from his lips before he was well aware.

"Why, you don't mean that you've turned believer?"

"I'm a believer that something should be done to save the world from that," said Carew, pointing to the Casino.

"What can do it?" asked Graham.

Carew was silent.

"What's made you so serious?" asked Graham.

Carew told him what he had seen and heard.

"Yes," replied Graham; "but what can you do? That is suggestive of what's going on here every day. Paint your blackest pictures, tell your ghastliest stories, and you only hint at what is going on in this place. It's a paradise, isn't it? Look at the flowers, the gardens, the mountains, the sea. The garden of Eden was a wilderness to this. But the devil's here all the same. My father is, as you know, a great advocate for foreign missions. He's just been made a dean, and I'm told it is because he's done so much for the evangelization of the heathen. But when I go back I shall tell him to devote his attention to this place."

"There is an English Church here, I suppose," replied Carew, with a sneer. "While that place yonder contributes something like a thousand pounds a year to the Church, and the Church takes it!"

"Not the English Church," said Graham.

"No, but—but—where is the difference? My God, what would Jesus Christ say if He came to Monte Carlo?"

Graham looked at him in astonishment. "What's come over you Carew? You the atheist, you about whom that story was told! Why, it's like Saul among the prophets!"

"Yes, yes; I know. But this place sets one thinking."

"What?"

"That if people are not influenced by religion they——" He hesitated as though he could not think of the words to finish his sentence.

"Yes, yes: I might be listening to my father, Carew. He's always preaching that money, education, good houses, refined associations are all powerless. Nothing but the Gospel of Jesus Christ can save people. I hear he's planning a mission to the rich, the idle and the educated. God knows there's need for it."

"And yet there's a Roman Catholic Church in Monte Carlo," said Carew, "several I expect."

"My father, who is an old-fashioned Protestant, says that—that—well, he does not believe you find Christianity in them," said Graham. "How can there be when they will take money earned at that place?"

There was a silence for a few minutes, and then Graham burst out laughing. "Fancy discussing Christianity in Monte Carlo!" he cried.

"There is need of something," said Carew.

Again Graham looked at him in surprise, but, noting the look on Carew's face, he said nothing.

"Are you staying here long?" said Graham, presently.

"No," said Carew.

"Where are you going?"

"Where?"

"Yes."

"Where? I hadn't thought. Oh, yes; I'm going down to Bordighera for a week or two. I want to have a little quiet."

"I suppose you are going to write that book I heard about?"

"Probably. I don't know; but I shall go on there to-night. I've not taken rooms at any hotel here, and my luggage is at the station."

"By the way, Graham, can I speak to you for a moment?" A young man who came up to them made this request.

"Excuse me a moment, Carew. I'll be back in a few minutes," said Graham, and he left the young man alone.

Carew sat and looked out over the sea. Graham had asked him what was the matter with him, and he tried to answer the question himself. It was not the first time he had visited Monte Carlo, and although no gambler, he had placed money on the tables. He had also heard tragic stories concerning these same gaming tables, but they had not impressed him, he had given them only a passing thought. Now, however, all was different. He began to think of what such a life as that represented at Monte Carlo meant. He saw the uselessness, the hollowness, the tragedy of it all. The gambler suffered from disease, just as much as De Quincey or Coleridge suffered from disease. What was at first a pastime became a passion, a mania. And yet the drift of the world was in that direction.

Doubtless what he had seen at the East-End of London had affected his thoughts, and his work at the East End, again, was the outcome of his experiences at Tel Moloch.

But he was thoughtful, he could not deny it, and he was beginning to look at life differently. The life of the pleasure-seeker at Monte Carlo, the gambler at the tables, was as sad as the life of Ikey Schmidt, or Sally-in-our-Alley at Binker's Lane. What could change it? Get to the bottom of human needs, and man needed a religion. If those people believed in Jesus Christ's teaching all would be different. Perhaps, in a way, they did believe in it, just as the ancient Romans believed in the teachings of Seneca. A motive-power was needed, a driving force was needed. Who or what could supply it?

Graham came back again.

"Have you heard of the Monte Carlo sensation?" he asked.

"No. What is it?"

"Oh, only a young fellow shot himself last night. Very little notice is being taken of it. You see, it happens so frequently."

"Just so," said Carew, looking out over the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

Carew did not go to Bordighera that night. He stayed at Monte Carlo, and watched the life of the town. What a Vanity Fair it was! Everything seemed to be on sale, and the price often paid was virtue, honour, heaven. On every hand there was an eager quest for passing pleasure, for excitement, and on every hand men and women sought to meet the demand. Honour, virtue, modesty seemed to be at a discount. Monte Carlo at night was hell let loose. But it was a beautiful hell; hell covered with veneer, hell made attractive by art and music and beauty. But Carew saw the hell beneath the trappings. Never could there be a sadder crowd, in spite of laughter, music, wine and revelry, than the crowd of pleasure-seekers at Monte Carlo.

"I've said for years that religion was a played-out fallacy," thought Carew; "here at all events is life without religion. And what is it all but a repetition of the orgies of Rome and Pompeii? Still, when religion is a played-out fallacy——"

The next day he went on to Bordighera. It was at least a change after Monte Carlo. The people here were of a soberer character. Heads of families brought their families here for rest and change. Tired, over-worked men, oppressed by the toil and the dark fogs of London, had come here to recuperate their jaded energies. They were people who could find employment without unhealthy excitement, their pleasures were simple and natural. He stayed a week in the district, quietly roaming among the hills, and thinking out the problem of his life.

He had no longer any hope of winning Joan Winscombe. She had rejected him definitely, and while her attitude towards him was more friendly, it offered him no hope.

"Life's a big disappointment," he reflected; "that is, life is desire without realization. An eternal quest, but the quest ends in nothing."

At the end of a week he grew restless. He could not settle down to write his book, and yet his inactivity palled upon him. But what should he do? He shrank from going back to London, he had no desire to visit Binker's Lane, and nothing offered him any attraction.

"I'll go back to Paris," he said one Sunday evening; "I think I shall be able to put in a few days there. Perhaps I'll stop at Cannes for a night, and see if—if—but what is the

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE NOVELIST AND PREACHER

It was a noble face which Carew saw, a face which reminded him of the leader of a people. He might have been some old patriarch living in patriarchal days. This old man might be the head of a clan, while his followers had gathered in an ancestral hall to hear their chief's commands. It was a strong face, with strongly-marked features. The forehead was not high, but it was full and broad; the eyes were not large, but they gleamed with a bright light, a kindly light. It was impossible for him to see the play of the mouth because of the heavy beard and moustache. The novelist wore a black velvet coat, and his long white beard rested upon his vest. There was something poetical, as well as patriarchal, about his appearance.

How quiet and restful everything was! What a contrast to the garish scenes at Monte Carlo! The gay gambling saloon was only a few miles away, but it might have been in another world.

Presently every one was seated, and the old novelist, who had been talking with two or three personal friends, now looked out upon those who had come to see him. At first Carew thought he saw a look of wonder in his eyes, a look of doubt. He might have been saying to himself, "What shall I say to these people?"

On the table by his side lay several books. A copy of Shakespeare was there, also two copies of Dante's *Purgatorio*, one in the original, the other in English. A Bible was also lying there. For a moment he seemed to hesitate from which he should read. Then he looked out among the people again.

"I am glad to see you, my friends," he said. "It is good of you to come to see an old man who can spend only his summer months in England, good of you to let me hear your voices. It is little I can do to repay you for your kindness in coming. I am an old man now, only waiting for my Lord to call me home. It cannot be long now, for which I am very glad. I have finished my work, and am only sitting in idleness until He shall take me to a place where I can begin work again. One of the penalties of growing old is that one is parted from one's friends. I have had to say good-bye to them one by one, and while I do long to stay with my loved ones a little longer, I want to meet some of my old friends again. It will not be long now. I have been reading the *Purgatorio* to-day, and I want to chat with Dante. Certain of his references are not clear to me. Of course, I never knew Dante in the flesh, but I long to see him all the same. Then there's Coleridge. I shall have a discussion with him some day about some verses in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. But that is not what I meant to say. I think I see in the faces of some of you suggestions of doubt. Some of you do not believe in God or His Divine Son. I think, since you are good enough to come and see me, I will talk with you about Him. But let me read to you first of all a few words which one who, like myself, had grown old, and was waiting for his Master's call, said about his Lord. It is from John's first letter to his fellow-Christians; John, who knew his Lord better than the other apostles; John, who rested his head upon His bosom."

A great silence had fallen upon the company. An old clock which was in the room ticked quietly, yet at every swing of the pendulum it seemed to make a great noise, so profound was the silence. The old novelist spoke with a strong Scotch accent, and once or twice his voice showed signs of his age.

"I might be in church," thought Carew. "No, after all, it is not like church. Everything is too real. There are no gewgaws, no figures of apostles and saints, no hocus-pocus to try and make people believe. No tinkling of bells, no swinging of censers, no smell of incense, no mumbling of prayers that have no meaning. It is simply an old man talking about something which is very real to him. I must get hold of his books at the first opportunity."

The old novelist took the Bible in his hands, and began to turn over the leaves.

"*'That which was from the beginning,'*" he read presently, "*'which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life. . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us. And these things we write unto you that your joy may be full.*"

"*'This, then, is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.'*"

Then he began to talk, not as though he were preaching a sermon, but as though he were speaking to little children about things which were as real as the beauty of flowers, the laughter of children, or the song of the birds. And as Carew listened he knew they were real to him. It was all very wonderful, wonderful in its simplicity, wonderful, too, because what was so real to the old man also became real to those who sat around. As he listened Carew well-nigh forgot where he was. There was no suggestion of an Italian villa situated near a fashionable watering-place. He might have been at Ephesus, where the Apostle John had probably ended his days. The old man, sitting in his armchair, like some old Scottish chieftain, might be the Apostle John himself, saying to his followers, "Little children, love one another."

It was all very wonderful. It made him think of that night when he read John's Gospel for the first time, and to remember the wonderful words he spoke. "And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have eternal life." Yes, it was easy to believe while in such an atmosphere. Rather, it was difficult not to believe. What was the secret of the

quiet calm which reigned? It might be that the presence of something eternal brooded over them.

How foolish, how absurd, how tawdry were the ideas of Christianity and Christ's Church in which he was reared! What did all the machinery of the Church matter? Christianity was the spirit of life, of faith, of receptivity. Here was this old man, who had faced his doubts and lived through them; here was one who had read the books of sceptical philosophers and materialistic scientists, who had probed to the bottom the value of rationalistic philosophy, talking to them pretty much as old Father Whitman might talk to them. Yes, the language was different, for the old novelist spoke as a scholar and a thinker, but at heart his message was the same. It was the same message, the Divine life of one who lived and was crucified.

Crucified! His mind swept like lightning to Tel Moloch, where, instead of this quiet and thoughtful assembly, was a crowd of fanatical Arabs. Again he saw the cross placed upon the earth, while he had crushed it beneath his heel.

All this passed through his mind, and yet he never missed a word which the old teacher uttered, not a thought was expressed which escaped him. Not that he believed, and yet at times it seemed as though the wall of materialism seemed to melt away, while beyond he could see the sunlit fields of beauty.

How little was the world in which a materialist lived! Sixty or seventy years of asking questions, and then everlasting darkness; but the old novelist's world was infinite, life was infinite.

Leave now to dogs and apes,  
Man has for ever!

Yes, Browning saw that; it was the great working truth of his life, while he and that crowd at Monte Carlo lived like earthworms, grubbing amidst the mud. He thought of the creeds in which he was reared, but they scarcely bore any resemblance to the great truths which were being taught. They were the tawdry lies which had grown up around a simple yet universal faith. God was greater, Jesus Christ was grander, life was more wonderful than all these things ever suggested.

At length the old novelist ceased speaking, and a silence fell upon the little company. Then he spoke again. "I think that is all I have to say to you to-night," he said: "but before we separate will you let me pray with you?"

As if by one consent the company knelt—all except Carew. He sat still and looked at the face of the teacher. The prayer he offered was very simple, but it was very real. The old man seemed to be talking to One whose ear was close to his lips, to One in whom he had implicit trust, implicit confidence.

"Even so come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

The company rose and prepared to depart; one by one the visitors went to the old novelist and shook hands with him and then quietly walked away. But Carew remained behind.

"Aren't you coming?" said the acquaintance who had asked him to accompany him there.

"Not yet," replied Carew. "I am going to have a few minutes' chat with him."

Presently the last visitor departed, and no one but the novelist and his family remained. Then Carew rose and went towards him.

"Are you too tired to give me a few minutes alone?" he said. "I want to tell you something, something which has to do with your address to-night."

The old novelist looked at him keenly, then he pointed to a chair. "I am not at all tired, and I should like a chat with you. Won't you have some supper with us first?"

"That would be too great a presumption on my part," said Carew.

The novelist laughed. "I am afraid you will find us rather noisy," he said. "You see, I always keep the house full of children. Years ago God gave me a great many of my own; now, when my own are grown up, I get other people's. They keep me young."

A minute later Carew was the centre of a great, happy family. There was no suggestion of the quiet thoughtfulness of half an hour before, and yet the noise and the merriment were in perfect accord with it. Life to the novelist was not a narrow asceticism, but a fulness of being,

a development of every faculty. Everything was sacred to him, and all was a part of the great life and will of God.

Presently the meal was over and quietness reigned again.

"Now for our chat," said the old man. "I think there are some decent cigars in the house, and although I am no great smoker now I'll join you."

A few minutes later Carew found himself talking as though he had known him for years. Here was a man to whom he could unbosom himself, one to whom he could tell not only the experiences of the last few months, but those deeper thoughts which had been locked up in his heart.

The old novelist listened quietly. Sometimes there was amusement in his kindly eyes, and at others there was a look of infinite pity and compassion. Presently statements led to questionings, and questionings to explanations. Before an hour was over Carew had told the story of his life, he had even related the history of his love for Joan Winscombe.

"Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God," said the old novelist presently.

Carew shook his head.

"I have not an atom of faith," he said. "While you were speaking during the evening it seemed easy to believe, the blank wall of materialism seemed to melt away; even now I could almost say that I believe. I have been in, and still am in, an atmosphere of faith; but I shall go back to the hotel presently. Probably in a few days I shall be in Paris, where I shall stay for a time among some artist friends in the Latin quarter. Then I shall be in an atmosphere of materialism, and then I shall no longer believe."

"Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God," repeated the old man.

Carew started to his feet. "I shall be laughing at myself as a sentimental, emotional idiot to-morrow," he said. "The influences of a lifetime are not so easily eradicated. I shall explain away the influences of this evening. I shall believe that magnetic forces have been at work—mental telepathy, mesmerism, what you like—and all those things which appear so real to you will resolve themselves into nervous emotions, animal magnetism and the like."

The old man laughed like one well pleased. "Whatever else you are, Mr. Carew," he said, "you are a passably

honest young man. Unconsciously you have been seeking after God, and God is to be found."

"Is He? Are you sure?"

"Am I sure that the song of a nightingale is sweet?" he said. "I am just as sure that God can be found. And you are going on seeking."

Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"I must be going now," he said. "Thank you very much for being so patient with me. I wish I had met you ten years ago."

"I wish you had," replied the old novelist; "but never mind, the years are not wasted."

"I shall never, can never, believe in churches, or religion as taught by the churches," said Carew presently.

"Well, does that matter? The churches are like scaffolding to a building."

"That assumes that they are necessary."

"To some minds they are."

He went to the door, the old novelist accompanying him. The moon sailed in a nearly cloudless sky, and so bright was the great regent of the night that scarcely a star appeared.

"How beautiful God is!" said the old man.

Carew was silent.

"You don't believe it?"

"Two nights ago I asked the woman I loved to marry me," said Carew. "She sent me away hopeless. To you my feeling is doubtless poor, unworthy. But when a man who gives all that is best in his nature, gives it because he can't help it, and yet it is refused, he can't feel very sentimental about moonlit nights."

"My dear lad, the God that led you to love that woman knows all about it. And the love is not in vain."

"Do you mean to say that my love will some day be returned?"

"Probably not. Probably it is best it should not. All I know is that the love is not in vain, and that some time you will know it. There's no chance in the world, my son."

"What is there, then?"

"Love, Eternal love."

"Good-night, sir," said Carew, holding out his hand.

"Do you know the Spanish formula?" said the old man. "*Va con Dios*: 'Go with God.' Tell me when the light comes."

"It will never come," said Carew.

"Not this side the sunset, perhaps," replied the other. "But if it does not, tell me on the other side."

"If there is another side," said Carew.

"Ah, but there is. I've seen it. Good-night."

Carew did not leave Bordighera for several days, but neither did he go to see the old prophet again. He longed to exceedingly, but something kept him, why, he did not know.

He wrote to George Gibbins and Mrs. Simpson, giving certain instructions, and also asking for news as to how the work was progressing, and then decided to wait until the answer came. He took long walks over the mountains which lie at the back of San Remo and Bordighera; he went into the cottages of the peasants and talked with the people, and all the time he tried to look the future straight in the face.

It came to him then that life, as far as he was concerned, was scarcely worth the living. He found no interest in anything. First of all, he came to the conclusion that Joan Winscombe could never care for him, and that even if she could she could never be his wife. He had, by that action at Tel Moloch, raised a barrier between them which could never be removed. He had outraged her feelings; he had done that which to her was heinous beyond words. No, Joan Winscombe, the one woman which he had ever really loved, could never be his, and that fact covered the sky of his life like a great black cloud. What, then, had he to live for? He knew not why, but all interest in the book he had intended to write was gone. What was the history of the Stones of Moab which lay in the mosque at Tel Moloch to him? What did he care for the legends of the Arabs? To Sir Richard Winscombe it might be of interest. It was. But then Sir Richard was an antiquary, and believed that those old stones which he had gone so far to seek would influence the religious thought of the world. There seemed no reason why he should live. The world had no need for him, and he had no purpose in life. If he were obliged to work for a livelihood the world might be a different place.

But he was not. He had inherited from his mother more money than he needed. Years ago he liked to do journalistic work, but now he felt no interest in it. He had no faith. God was not real to him.

And yet the experiences of the night which he had spent at the house of the old novelist haunted him. There must be something in it all, but he could not experience it. He came from the dark, and he would go into the dark. He could not explain the mystery of life, but he felt that he was simply the product of material forces.

He did not seriously contemplate suicide. He only knew that he had no great desire to live, and that he should not be at all sorry if he were to die. Why did he not feel the same zest for life as he felt, when, to save himself from death, he had trampled on the symbol which to so many was a sacred thing? He could not explain.

Presently he received letters from George Gibbins and Mrs. Simpson. Both of them wrote hopefully about their work generally, but they were very pessimistic about those in whose reformation he was interested. The respectable men and girls appreciated the club, but the drunkards and the outcasts never came. As for Ikey Schmidt and Barker, they had been both drunk on the very night after they had signed the pledge; while Sally-in-our-Alley and Nell Harkwright were regarded as utterly hopeless.

"It is no use," wrote Mrs. Simpson. "I've done everything I can for those girls, and I can make no headway. They simply don't want to be respectable, and, what is more, if I could get them to the club they would keep the respectable ones from coming. My advice is, sir, let them go. You'll never do them any good. They are a very bad lot, and if there is one thing worse than another that is the thing they want to do. At present Nell Harkwright is living with one of the worst characters in the district, a man who has been in prison several times; and as for Sally, I've lost sight of her for some days."

It was not cheerful news, but, strange as it may seem, it gave Carew a kind of interest in his work which he had not felt for a long time.

"I wonder what Father Whitman is doing, and how he's getting on with his people?" he reflected. "It's three

weeks now since I left Binker's Lane. I'll go back and see what they are doing."

A few days later he was in London again, and he went straight to Binker's Lane. He little thought, as he drove up to No. 15, of what would happen during the next few weeks.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### HOW CAREW LOST HIS WAGER.

FOR some time after his return, Carew devoted himself to the finding and the reforming of the men and women for whom he had established his clubs. Why he was so anxious about them he could not explain, but no city missionary ever strove harder for the salvation of souls than Carew strove for the moral reclamation of Ikey Schmidt, Jim Barker and Nell Harkwright. As for "Sally-in-our-Alley," he had lost sight of her altogether. He had made all sorts of inquiries, in vain, and he was at last led to the conclusion that either Sally had left the district or was dead. He was very much disappointed at this, but he bestowed all the more attention on the others. He kept to the part of his bargain that not a word about religion should be spoken, but he offered every inducement he could think of to persuade them as to the wisdom of a well-conducted, orderly life. But his experiences were only a repetition of those of Mrs. Simpson and George Gibbins.

"Wot's the use o' tryin' to be good and respectable?" said Nell. "I don't want to be respectable, I tell yer so straight. If I was respectable I could never go on the booze, and I could never 'ave a good time."

Carew tried to appeal to her womanhood, and to a woman's sense of modesty, but Nell only laughed at him.

"Oh, stow yer blarney, guv'nor," she said; "I want no pious talks, and I won't have none. I'm goin' to enjoy myself, I am."

This and a great deal more she told him when she was in a communicative mood ; indeed, she told him her mind so completely that Carew felt that Mrs. Simpson was right. The girl's case was hopeless.

When he asked whether she knew anything of Sally-in-our-Alley, Nell, while professing entire ignorance of her whereabouts, seemed to be perfectly at ease about her.

"Sal'll turn up orl right," she persisted. "When I saw her lawst she 'ad a new pal, she 'ad. He was a gipsy, he was, so perhaps she's on the tramp. But Sal'll come back again ; Sal likes 'er booze she does, and wot's more she knows where she can git it."

When Carew tried to persuade her to marry the man she was living with, she at first laughed in his face and asked him if he was "a bloomin' sky pilot."

He called to mind what "Lord Claude" had said to him in Father Whitman's doss-house. "The great thing needed," said this pedantic mountebank, "is moral ambition. Until you can arouse that, we shall remain as we are, walking swill-tubs."

He was just as unsuccessful with the men.

"The troof is, guvnor," said Ikey Schmidt, "I just cawn't do without my booze. It's meat and drink ter me, it is. My inside's all on a burn for it, it is. The lawst time you 'ad a talk wi' me, I said I'd go stright, I did. But the next day the thirst came on me and I said, 'I'll just 'ave one glass, I will, an' only one' ; but afore I left the pub., guvnor, I wos blind drunk, I wos."

It was weary work, but still he persevered, only to be disappointed. He studiously avoided Father Whitman's mission, neither did he come into contact with the old missionary. Binker's Lane was more than a mile from the centre of Father Whitman's labours, and as a consequence they did not meet.

After a time, however, Carew made his way to the old man's house. It was on a Sunday afternoon, and he was fortunate in finding him in.

"Ah, Mr. Carew, you've come to report progress, I suppose. It's more than six months now since we started, and now we are both free to speak."

The old man spoke cheerfully, nay, more, it was evident

from his boisterous laugh and the bright look in his eyes that he was in a very jubilant mood.

"No, I've nothing to report," replied Carew, "but I thought I'd come over and have a chat."

"That's right. I heard just after you were here last, that you had gone to the South of France. Did you stay with Sir Richard?"

"No, I was in Cannes only one night. I went down to Italy."

"Ah, but you saw Miss Winscombe and Sir Richard?"

"Only for an hour or so."

"Then you don't know whether the news is true?"

"What news?"

"That she's engaged to Mr. Trengrove."

"Is that reported?"

"Yes. I haven't seen Mr. Trengrove for some time, but I know he has had a call to a big church, and that he's seeking a house. It is believed that he's going to get married."

"Possibly," said Carew quietly. "I know nothing about it. Have you heard anything from her?"

"Not much. I'm told that she's coming home from Switzerland shortly, and that she's coming down here immediately on her return."

"To help you in your work?"

"Yes, why else should she come? A lady like Miss Winscombe would not come here to enjoy herself. And yet I don't know. She has often told me that she's never so happy as when she's down here. Is tea ready, mother? That's right. Mr. Carew has come to have a cup with us, and I mustn't be long over it, because I must get ready for my meeting."

"What sort of a meeting have you?" said Carew.

"Oh, my usual Sunday night meeting. You've never been at one of them, have you? Why not come to-night, and then come in for a bit of supper afterwards? I can report progress better after the meeting. I shall have more time you know." And there was a peculiar twinkle in the old man's eyes.

"I don't mind if I do," said Carew. "I had thought of going up West after seeing you, but there's no need that I should."

During tea the conversation was general. Mrs. Whitman and the young lady who was at the time helping in the work related stories in connection with the women's doss-house, while Carew told of some of the things he had seen at Monte Carlo and Bordighera. As for Father Whitman, he seemed very busy thinking out the address he meant to give at the meeting which was to be shortly held.

Soon after six o'clock, Carew found his way into the hall where Father Whitman usually held his Sunday evening services. It was a fairly large building, seating some five or six hundred persons. Although the time for commencement had not yet arrived the place was almost filled, and before the first hymn was sung there was not an available seat anywhere. Carew could not help being struck by the character of the people present.

It is true that a good many in the company belonged to the flotsam and jetsam of life. Brazen-faced women were there, who mocked the science of civilization; sodden men were there, whose greatest joy seemed to be to satisfy all that was bestial in their lives; but in the main it was a happy gathering, although the people were drawn from the slums of the East End.

Father Whitman gave out the first hymn, and Carew felt like laughing as he opened the hymn-book which had been given to him, and read the lines they were going to sing. By no stretch of the imagination could they be called poetry. Many of the hymns in the book were doggerel, and poor doggerel at that. And yet the people sang with great gusto. "Where is your anchor?" was the refrain, which rolled and swelled over the hall.

The hymn spoke of the trials of life, its difficulties and sorrows and struggles, and then asked the question, "Where is your anchor?" Carew looked at the faces of the people as they sang. Horny-handed, low-browed, uneducated men were there; tired, faded-looking women were there, women who stood all day before an ironing-board, or sewed buttonholes, or made paper bags. Few were the joys of their lives, and many their hardships, and thus they doubtless felt the truth of the words they sang. But at the end of each verse there was a note of triumph, for in answer to the question, "Where is your anchor?" they burst forth

into the reply, "Christ is our anchor, Christ the Son of God!"

"They believe it, too," thought Carew; "they have no doubts about it, and they are joyful."

Presently they came to the last verse. It spoke of the time when the clammy hand of death should be placed on their brows, and when they would have to go out into the great unknown land. Carew saw tears in their eyes as they sang. Some of them had doubtless lost dear ones, they had buried father, mother, friends, children, and the great mystery of death possessed them as it possesses all who think of it. Then came the question again, "Where is your anchor?" and joyfully they gave back the answer, "Christ is our anchor! Christ is our anchor!" Some shouted Hallelujah, while on the faces of many tears of joy rolled.

"Great God, if it helps them, let them have it," thought Carew. "What would they be without their faith? Aye, where would they be this very night without it? Probably in some pigsty of sin, or drunk in some public-house."

After the hymn, old Father Whitman prayed. It was different from the prayer which the old novelist had offered a few Sunday nights before in the villa above the calm blue waters of the Mediterranean; but the faith which inspired the man of letters also inspired this simple city missionary, and the central thought of the prayer was the Man upon whose cross he had trampled to save his life. Yes, he felt ashamed of himself. He had been a coward, yes, and worse than a coward; he had trampled upon the symbol of a truth which was the greatest force for righteousness he had ever seen. He had tried to reform people without Christ. He had selected the drink-sodden and lust-sodden, and taught them what he called "common-sense." He had surrounded their lives by what he called refining influences, and his work had had no effect upon those whom he had tried to reform. Ike Schmidt and Jim Barker were probably drunk, while Nell Harkwright could not be aroused even to a desire for a decent life. While here—what were these people, from whence did they come?

Father Whitman concluded his prayer and gave out another hymn. Then he read a portion of the New Testament—the story of the woman who sat by the well at Samaria, and afterwards he began his address.

It was not eloquent, it was not learned ; there were no finely rounded sentences, no choice thought, and yet he held Carew's attention. It was the address of a strong, common-sense, vigorous-minded man ; but more, it was the address of the man who knew the people to whom he was talking, and who felt sure that the Gospel which he preached would meet their needs. Again Carew felt the difference between this address and that of the man who spoke to the quiet, thoughtful assembly at Bordighera, but he realized the similarity too. After all, it was the same Gospel, the same faith.

"Now," said the old man, when he had finished, "I have had my say, and you must have yours. You know, many of you, whether this Gospel is true or no.; you know what it has done for you."

Carew felt almost sorry that Father Whitman had decided to let the meeting take this course. He called to mind some of the stories he had heard concerning reformed rakes giving their experiences, and had laughed at them. And he did not feel in the humour for laughing to-night. Still he looked towards the platform with interest, and when one after another got up and told of the change in their lives through faith in Jesus Christ, he was simply staggered by what he heard. For it was Father Whitman's story repeated again and again. But this was not all, for presently a man rose whose face he remembered. Yes, it was a man who had been selected months before, as one of those on whose reformation Father Whitman had staked his faith in Christianity. He remembered him perfectly, and yet the change in him was so great that he almost doubted. A few months ago the man was a great hulking blackguard ; acknowledged to be one of the most hopeless characters in the district. Then his face was bloated, his clothes were torn and dirty ; now, although he was anything but attractive in appearance, he was sober and respectably dressed. But more than that, Carew noticed the bright look in his eyes which had struck him at first as he had looked on the faces of this motley assembly.

"I am almost ashamed to speak," said the man, in a broken, stammering voice ; "all the same, I'd like to tell you what the Lord hev done fer me. First I thought I wouldn't sey nothink, 'cause I were feared, and 'cause, well,

I in't a-kip stright for more'n four months. Ses you, 'Arry'll fall back, 'ee will; let 'im wite a bit,' ses you; but I cawnt 'elp speakin', friends. Four months ago—well, you knows wot I wos and wot I'd been for years afore. Wen Farver Whitman told me 'ee wos a-prayin' for me, I told 'im to go to 'ell, I did, and I kep' on in my ole wy wuss nor ever. Orl the sime, Farver Whitman got me to come 'ere, 'ee did, and then—well, I got miserable, I did, and I felt as 'ow I'd like to be a man, I did, instead of a beastly drunken, thievin', dirty blackguard. Well, I dunnow 'ow 'twas, but Farver Whitman got me on my knees, he did, and—and, well, afore I know'd wot I wur abaat, I wur crying like a babby. And then—well, I can't explain it, friends, but a chynge came over me and I felt a new man. Of course, my ole pals chauwffed me, and plyed orl sorts o' tricks, but I'm 'ere to-dy and I'm a noo man. I am, friends, I am. Yus, often and often I just longs for a drop o' drink, and then I just prays. You knoes my ole Dutch, too. Well, she'd left me, she 'ad, but I got 'er back; and I've took a 'euse, not a grand 'un, but it's clean and tidy like, and me and my old Dutch, wy we're a-sweetautin' agyne, we are myies, and—well, 'Will 'ee stand it?' ses you; no, not if 'Arry Simmons 'as to do it by hisself, but with Jesus with me I shall stand it, and I mean to stand it till I dies."

That the man was sincere there could be no doubt, tears were rolling down his face as he spoke, and it was this very sincerity that affected the crowd. Carew felt it. Cynical as he had always been about such stories, he could not deny the wonderful change. This man was as bad as Ikey Schmidt or Jim Barker, and yet he was a new man. He must make inquiries. What, after all, if the story of Christ were a mighty force, what if——?

His attention was directed to a woman's voice.

"I want ter speak, Father Whitman, if I may," it said, and Carew looked in the direction from which the voice came. It was the woman who had been lost to his club, it was Sally in our Alley.

"I don't think I should a-spoke, only there's a gentleman 'ere as 'as bin kind to gals like me. 'Ee stawted a club, 'ee did, in Binker's Lane and tried to get me to it. Yus, you knows me, I'm allays corled Sally in our Alley. Well, I went to his club, I did, 'cause—well, people said as 'ow he wur a

soft cove, and that we could git money aat on him withart workin', and that ther' worn't goin' to be no bloomin' religion, as I used ter corl it, in 'is club. Well, I pretended that I was a-goin' to start strypte, I did, just to kid 'im, and I signed the pledge an' orl that, but wen I found out that he expected me to work I just chucked 'is club, 'specially wen I found that I 'ad to behive myself and that the other girls turned up their noses at me. I think I went on the spree worse nor ever, and I come over this wy to live with a bloke I'd picked up. Then one night a young lidy talked to me like, and got me to come to a meetin' 'ere, and I got converted, I did. Yus, I knows you think it's wrong of me to talk abaat it 'cos I ain't a-bin converted more'n two months, but I'm livin' strite, I am, and I've turned tectotaller, I've, and I've chucked my bad ways, I've, and I'm wukkin' fer my livin' orl respectable like, and I worn't to be a good girl, I do. And ever since the Lord Jesus came to my heart I've wornted to go and tell the gentleman abaat it, but Farver Whitman wouldn't let me. 'Prove it's real,' ses 'ee, 'afore you tell 'im; give it a few months' trial'; but when I sees 'im 'ere, and when I 'ears 'Arry Simmons speak, my 'eart felt so full that I felt I must confess what the dear Lord 'ad done fer me."

Carew looked at the girl while she was speaking. Yes, there could be no doubt about it, whether the change would be lasting or not, it was certainly real. The girl had a new and better look on her face, there was a new expression in her eyes.

After the meeting was over, he spoke both to her and to 'Arry Simmons, and he questioned them concerning what they said, and the conversation was a revelation to him. What everything else had failed to do, this Gospel which Father Whitman preached had done. Would the change last? He could not tell, but if it had lasted for over thirty years in the case of Father Whitman and scores of others in the neighbourhood, why could it not last with them? Besides, his work from this standpoint was a failure. Ikey Schmidt, and Jim Barker, and Nell Harkwright were no nearer reformed characters to-day than they were on the first day he had commenced his work. He felt like saying, with the old Roman Emperor, "Ob! pale Galilean, Thou hast conquered." There were a thousand questions in his mind

which remained unanswered, but he could not deny the power which had changed the lives of those people in that hall.

He stayed with Father Whitman until nearly midnight. He felt that the old missionary possessed a secret unknown to him. The knowledge of the schoolmen was as foolishness compared with the wisdom of this old man. And when the conversation at length came to an end he walked quietly back to his room in Binker's Lane.

The twelve months were not yet up, but he felt that his schemes for the reformation of the lost were played out. They lacked driving force, they lacked the power to change character, and therein lay the whole secret.

He did not go to bed when he returned. Instead, he took the New Testament which he had brought with him to Binker's Lane and began to read.

"Believe, believe, believe," he said presently. "But how can I believe? Yes, I cannot help believing in what I have seen, but how can I believe for myself?"

He sat for a long time in deep thought. "I wonder if it can be true?" he went on presently; "I wonder now, if I prayed, should I get any answer?" After a while he knelt down and began to pray. How long he knelt he did not know, but as he prayed it seemed to him as though a change came over him. His heart grew lighter, and a great light took the place of darkness.

"What does it mean?" he asked like one dazed. "Can it be that God is answering my prayer?"

He did not realize that he had been praying for months, that unknown to himself he had been groping in the dark towards truth and reality, and that all his experience was really search after God; but he knew that light, that faith had come to him. It was not an intellectual change which he had realized, it was a consciousness of God; it was the realization that Christ was no mere name, not a myth, but a new life in his heart. He could formulate no creed, he did not need any. In a very deep sense he knew that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

"Why, I believe!" he cried presently. "No, I do not believe, I know! I know!"

He walked to and fro in the room and tried to understand what he felt; but he could not; it was beyond thought.

It was a great consciousness of a new life, of new purpose, of new strength. His heaven was higher, life was longer, grander. He had been born anew!

He laughed aloud in his new-found joy. He could understand nothing, but he knew that God was a reality, that Christ was no far-off theological myth, but a living Presence.

The next morning he found his way to Father Whitman's mission house.

"You remember our wager?" he said to the old man. "You did not mention it last night, but it was in your mind all the time."

"Yes, it was," replied Father Whitman, looking at him steadily.

"I came to tell you that—that—well, I admit you have won and I have lost."

Whitman did not speak, but he kept his eyes fixed on the young man's face.

"I know the year is not up yet, but I confess that you are right."

"And the other part?" said the old missionary; "what about that?"

"I played the game, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am enough of a sportsman to play the game out."

"But, but——"

"I—I—Father Whitman, I want you to take those clubs off my hands. I want you to tell those men and women about Christ."

"But you, Mr. Carew, what are you going to do?"

"I—oh! I am going to play the game, that's all."

"Play the game?"

"Yes, a man must do that. I am an old public schoolboy, Whitman, and one of our standards of honour was that we must play the game although we might be losing—play the game and not foul the pitch."

Whitman looked bewildered. "I do not understand you sir," he said; "but that doesn't matter, you've got the light. When did it come? Was it last night after you had left me?"

"Yes."

"I expected it; I was praying for you all night. But

about those clubs, sir—are you serious about handing them over to me ? ”

“ Quite serious.”

“ Are you going away then ? ”

“ Yes, for a time.”

“ But why, sir ? You could do such——”

“ I must go, Whitman ; I must play the game.”

“ I don’t understand, sir. When do you go ? ”

“ Oh ! to-day—to-morrow—soon, anyhow. Good-bye, Whitman. I leave the clubs to you, and here is something to keep the wolf from the door,” and he handed him a slip of paper.

“ But you’ll be back again soon ? ”

“ There’s no knowing.”

There was a look of utter bewilderment in the old man’s eyes. He wondered what was in Carew’s mind ; but the young man looked so happy that he knew all was well.

“ I’m expecting Miss Winscombe home shortly—is there any message I can give her ? ” he said.

Carew felt his heart beat wildly, and for a few minutes he did not speak. “ Yes,” he said presently, “ you can tell her that I lost the wager and that I’m very glad. That’s all, I think.”

“ That’s all, sir.”

“ Yes, that’s all. You can tell her I played the game fairly—and—and that I hope I am a good sportsman.”

“ I’ll tell her, sir, but I don’t understand a bit what you mean. Will she understand ? ”

“ No, I don’t think she will. But that does not matter. Good-bye.”

“ But I shall see you back again soon ? ”

“ I don’t know. And that doesn’t matter either, does it ? ”

A few hours later Bamfield Carew was in his father’s house.

## CHAPTER XXV

### CAREW'S RETURN TO TEL MOLOCH

CAREW was sitting in an armchair looking towards his father, while Father Mussi looked first at one then at the other.

Carew had told his father and the priest of his experiences during the last few months, and now he was answering questions which first the one and then the other asked him.

At first there was a look of great joy in the eyes of Mr. Carew as Bamfield told his story, but presently an expression of disappointment rested upon his face.

"But you believe?"

"Yes, father, I believe."

"Then you can come back to the Church?"

Carew shook his head.

"But it is your duty. You dare not refuse."

"No," said Bamfield, "I cannot do that, but I thought I ought to tell you what has come to pass. I am glad, too, that Father Mussi happened to be here."

"But why not? You are not a Protestant."

"I don't know. That does not matter, does it? Whether I belong to this or that Church matters no more than the kind of buttons I wear on my coat. I believe in the Son of God, that is the thing that matters."

"But don't you see that you are still an unbeliever if you deny the Church of Christ? It is His Body."

A look like pain came into Carew's eyes. "I am afraid you do not understand, father," he said. "When a man who has been in the darkness for years comes into the light, he does not trouble about the colour of the window curtains. He sees, sees! That is everything."

For a long time the priest and his father argued with him, but they were living in different worlds. Bamfield knew! He lived in a realm of light and consciousness; the others were in the twilight of symbols, and dogmas, and mechanical contrivances. To the young man who had seen the vision of Christ, faith was not a matter of apostolical succession, transubstantiation, priesthood, and the singing of masses. These were the trappings which helped to hide the truth. He had seen the Christ, he had entered the realm of certainty.

"I must come and see you," said Father Mussi, when presently Bamfield rose to go; "now that you believe, you will see your need of the Church."

Bamfield did not reply, but he shook the man's hand kindly and then turned to his father.

"I shall see you oftener now, I hope," said the older man.

"I don't know," replied Bamfield. "It is extremely doubtful. For the next few weeks I shall be out of London."

"Where are you going?"

Carew hesitated. "A rather long journey," he replied presently.

"Alone?"

"Yes, I am going alone."

Two days later he was on his way to Marseilles. He had been informed that he would be in time to catch a boat which was on its way to Port Said. He had caught the train which left the Gare du Lyons, in Paris, at nine o'clock at night, and on the following morning he found himself in this busy port of the Mediterranean.

He was evidently in a thoughtful mood, but there was no look of sorrow on his face. Rather, he was very cheerful. He spoke pleasantly to the porters who carried his luggage, and seemed to be enjoying his journey.

"Do you know whether the *Empress Eugène* has come into harbour yet?" he asked.

"No, M'sieur, it will not arrive until midday, and it will leave at four this afternoon. M'sieur will go to an hotel?"

"Yes. I want some breakfast badly, and after that I will go out to the Château D'If."

"My brother has a boat, M'sieur; a very good boat. He will take you. The name of the boat is *La Tulipe Noire*, after Dumas' novel."

"That is well, I will look out for *La Tulipe Noire*."

The cab rattled away towards the hotel, while Carew made himself as comfortable as possible in the by no means luxurious conveyance. After breakfast he went down to the harbour and engaged *La Tulipe Noire*. As the man rowed out towards the rock which Dumas has immortalized by his great scene in *The Count of Monte Cristo* Carew hummed a song. Evidently he was enjoying the excursion.

"In five days or so I shall be in Palestine," he thought. "I wonder if I shall ever see the Mediterranean again after that. I suppose it seems like a foolhardy thing to do, but I must play the game. I have fouled the pitch, and I must see that it is put right."

A few days later he arrived at Port Said, where he had to wait twenty-four hours for another vessel to take him to Jaffa. He fretted somewhat at the delay, and then laughed at himself for his impatience.

"Any one would think I was anxious to rush to my death," he said to himself. "All the same, I shall never be truly happy until I have atoned for that deed. My word, won't those old chaps be surprised when they see me? I little dreamed when I left Tel Moloch that I should be so anxious to return to it again. But I can't help it, I must tell them that I acted a coward's part, and that I recant every word I said to them."

From Port Said to Jaffa was only a few hours' journey. The vessel left in the evening, and arrived at Jaffa the following morning. Carew slept on the deck. He could not bear the heat in the close, stuffy cabins.

The hotel at Jaffa was empty.

"M'sieur is staying at Jaffa?" said the hotel manager.

"No, I go on to Jerusalem."

"But Jerusalem is a cauldron. M'sieur will not stay there."

"Not long."

"But M'sieur will not travel in Palestine through the summer? It is like being in an oven."

"No, I shall not travel in Palestine, I am going away among the mountains."

"What mountains?"

"Those beyond the Dead Sea."

The man shrugged his shoulders in despair. The Englishman must be mad. None but a madman would take such a journey in the height of summer.

Carew took the first train to Jerusalem, and arrived there, went to the *Mediterranean Hotel*. What a reeking, evil-smelling place Jerusalem was! In the square outside the hotel the people panted and perspired. Evil-looking, ill-fed dogs lay in the shady places and blinked. Ragged Turkish soldiers stood in the shadow of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and smoked ill-smelling cigarettes. Jerusalem did not look enticing.

As far as he could judge there was scarcely an English face to be seen, and, empty as the hotel was, the manager did not seem glad to see him. A spirit of utter lassitude pervaded the place.

But the man remembered him.

"Ah, M'sieur," said the manager, "you got away from the Arabs?"

"Yes, I got away."

"Report had it that they converted you."

Carew was silent. The man's words stung him.

"Ah, well," he went on, "we have all sorts of religions in Jerusalem. Plenty to choose from, eh?"

"And all of them centre in one at bottom," replied Carew.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "M'sieur is staying in Jerusalem?"

"No," replied Carew, "I propose going to Tel Moloch."

"Ah," said the other. "M'sieur can doubtless go in safety?"

"I do not fear what may happen to me there," replied Carew. He felt more free to speak now. No one in Jerusalem knew him, no one troubled what might happen. Besides, he had to make arrangements, and his journey could not be kept a secret any longer.

"Of course, M'sieur knows best," replied the man. "I should have thought, after hearing what Abdul and Yusef told me on their return, that you would not want to go again."

"I have reasons," replied Carew, quietly.

"They must be important?" queried the man.

"Yes, they are very important," replied Carew, but in such a tone that the other did not pursue the subject further.

"Are Abdul and Yusef in Jerusalem?" queried Carew.

"Yes, no; that is, they live in Bethany through the summer. They earn much during the spring and autumn, and they rest during the summer. Abdul has now set up as a dragoman in a grand way. He has horses and tents of his own. Abdul will die a rich man. Will M'sieur return by way of Jerusalem?"

"I do not yet know how or when I shall return," replied Carew.

The next day Carew walked to Bethany. A few clouds had gathered in the sky, and thus the journey was not unpleasant. Outside the Damascus gate he turned aside from the road to Bethany, and climbed the little hill where, in spite of the fact that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is supposed to cover Calvary, there is little doubt that Christ was crucified.

As Carew stood on the summit of the hill, a feeling which he could not account for filled his heart. "Here Jesus Christ was crucified," he said to himself; "Jesus Christ, Son of God. And I, to save my paltry life, denied Him; I trampled on the cross. Yes, I must wipe out that disgrace. I should never respect myself again if I didn't."

When he arrived at Bethany he was met by a crowd of half-naked, dirty and repulsive people, who pounced upon him for backsheesh. It was a piteous sight.

After a great deal of inquiry he at length found Abdul, who for a liberal remuneration offered to take him within a day's journey of Tel Moloch. At first he demurred against going altogether, and tried to dissuade Carew against taking the journey, but seeing that the young man was determined, and would therefore employ some one else if he refused, at length consented. But he would only go to a place some hours' journey from the old mosque. He had heard that the Sheikh ul Islam had sworn that he would be revenged upon those who took away Sir Richard Winscombe, especially as there had been a great plague in the village since his departure.

"But what has the plague to do with you?" asked Carew.

"Ah, Howajja, did I not help the great Englishman to get away? It was I who aided Yusef in returning to Jerusalem, and that led to the rescue of Sir Richard, who tried to carry away the stones of Moab. Is it not so? Did they

not demand your conversion to turn away the anger of Allah? But Sir Richard was not converted, and yet he lives. They believe the plague came because God was angry with them for not killing him."

Two days later Carew was again on his way to Tel Moloch. The journey was a weary one when he took it before, but now it was terrible. Indeed during the journey across the Valley of the Jordan, close to the Dead Sea, the pitiless heat of the sun almost made him sick, while the horses seemed too overcome to travel; but when they had crossed the Jordan, and began to climb the mountains, it grew cooler. The remainder of the journey, however, was made during early morning and late evening; from ten o'clock in the morning to five in the evening, they camped in a shady place and rested.

"I know it is madness," said Carew to himself, again and again. "It is difficult to see what good I can do by going; but I can't help it. I shall never be satisfied until I have confessed Christ on the very spot where I denied Him. Perhaps I shall make some of them see that a Christian is not afraid to die for his faith. Perhaps, perhaps—who knows?—when I tell them why I came, and what led me to believe, they may—but there, that is in God's hands. I should like to have bidden good-bye to Joan before I came away, but that might have led her to guess what I was going to do. No, no; I saved my paltry life by denying Christ, I can't do less than play the game now."

At the end of the sixth day he arrived at the spot, where Abdul had consented to bring him. He would not accompany him any further, he said. Howajja could walk to Tel Moloch in six hours, he could ride the distance in three; and neither he nor the muleteers would place themselves in danger by going an hour further.

Abdul had been very anxious to know why Carew wished to go to Tel Moloch again, seeing the first journey had turned out so disastrously. He concluded, however, that the mad Englishman fancied there was something there which he desired to obtain, and having accepted the Mohammedan faith could go in safety. Abdul had grave doubts about Carew's fidelity to Islam, however, especially as he did not subscribe to Mohammedan rites. But Abdul was rather hazy in his ideas about religious matters. He had been paid

well for his services, and he saw no reason for troubling.

"Howajja will be back shortly?" asked Abdul, who had accompanied Carew a little distance from the encampment towards Tel Moloch.

"I do not know," replied Carew.

"Then what are Howajja's commands?" asked the dragoman.

"I am going on a strange errand," replied Carew quietly. "I wonder how it will strike you? When I was in Tel Moloch before, I saved my life by denying Christ, by trampling on His Cross, and by pretending to accept the Mohammedan faith. I believed in nothing then, so I thought it did not matter. But since then I have learnt to believe in Christ. I have found out that Christianity is a great fact, a great truth, the greatest truth in all the world; I have learnt that the cross stands for all that is holiest in life, and that I did the basest thing a man could do when I trampled upon it. Christ is now more to me than anything else in the world. He has made everything new to me. What would you do if you were in my place, Abdul?"

The Arab hesitated before he replied.

"Howajja is going back to tell them all this, to tell them that Christ is His Lord, and not Mohammed?" said the Arab, gravely.

"Just that," replied Carew.

"They will kill you."

"Probably."

"They will kill you," repeated Abdul: "but, but—well I am a poor Arab, who has a wife and family, and I am afraid I should be a coward; but Howajja is an Englishman, and a man of honour, and—and—I don't see how he can do anything else."

"That's exactly how it strikes me," said Carew.

"But why did not Howajja bring soldiers to guard him? Howajja is rich and can pay."

"But that would not be playing the game, would it?" said Carew. "I denied Christ to save my life; if I confessed Him with soldiers at my back——"

"Yes, yes; I see," said Abdul; "that is why we have come out here alone."

"That is it; so if I am not back soon you will know——"

"And I can't get help now whatever I do."

"No, that's the best of it."

"Why?" asked the Arab.

"Because I might be tempted to turn coward. I don't think I should, but I might be tempted, and I must play the game fairly."

"I don't know what Howajja means about playing the game," said the Arab, "and I have a wife and children or I would accompany him."

Two hours later Carew saw the minarets of the great mosque. The time was evening, about two hours from sunset, and he knew that soon the village would be astir. Throughout the heat of the day the Arabs would lie in shady places and sleep, but in the cool of the evening every one would be active.

Away towards the south, he saw the place where he had trampled on the cross, but he did not go there; instead, he went straight towards the village, which stood near the *Ecd al Kurban*.

Once or twice the young man laughed as he rode. "It will give the old Johnnies a shock to see me again," he said to himself. "I wonder what they will say? I expect Ismayl has married Khamoor, the dark-eyed girl, whom old Ibrahim had allotted to me. And old Ibrahim would be angry when he found I had gone. I expect he will be angry now. As for the Nazir, who spent so much time on my religious instruction, and the others who all the time wanted to kill me, I expect they will want to make short work of me."

But there was no fear in Carew's eyes as he thought of these things. He could not explain why, but his heart beat joyously.

No sooner had he entered the village than a crowd gathered around him. Probably no European had been seen in Tel Moloch since he had left it, and that alone would be enough to cause them to gather. But some recognised him.

"It is the Frank!" they cried; "it is he who ran away from us! It is he who came to steal the sacred stones of Moab! Where is Ibrahim, son of Asmar? He must know!"

Carew alighted from his horse and looked around. It was not altogether an angry crowd. There was more curiosity and surprise than anger upon their faces. Some held out

their hands for backsheesh, while others rushed away to call their neighbours.

"Whom come you to see?" said a voice presently.

"I come to see Ibrahim, son of Asmar," replied Carew.

"And you bring gold, much gold from the land of gold?"

"No," replied Carew. "I do not bring much gold. I only come to tell you something."

"Ah, what? Tell us! Tell us!"

"When Ibrahim comes I will tell you," replied Carew.

"Achbar and Turslen and many more are gone for him; he will come with the speed of light."

"Have you many presents to give Ibrahim?" said a voice which he recognised, and turning, he saw Ismayl, who loved Khamoor, the daughter of Ibrahim. "If Howajja brings not many presents to Ibrahim let him beware—nay, rather let him fly while he may, for there is a great anger in the heart of Ibrahim against Howajja. He was not pleased that he would not stay and wed his daughter; he was angry that he would steal away like a thief in the night."

"I have come to tell Ibrahim something," replied Carew.

"A message from the far-off land?"

"Yes, if you will."

"Will it be pleasant to Ibrahim's ears?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Then Howajja will do well to fly before he comes."

"I shall not fly, seeing I have come many days' journey to tell him."

"Then must Howajja trust in Allah."

Ismayl had scarcely ceased speaking when Ibrahim came up.

There was a look of eager curiosity in the old man's eyes, and Carew also noticed the expression of greed which shone from them.

"You who ran away have returned," he said. "Men have told me that thou hast travelled far to see me. Is it because thou hast heard that I am to be Sheikh ul Islam after Abou Bazouki?"

"Nay, greatly as thou dost deserve that honour, I have not come for that."

"Then you have come to bring me gold—me who was kind to thee, me who led thee to faith, me to whom thou dost owe much?"

"I have come to tell you something. You and all the rest who have gathered here," said Carew.

"Not to me only? To all?"

"Yes to all. But not here."

"Not here? Where then?"

"When you saw me first you led me to a spot between the hills yonder. You told me that I deserved death because I had desecrated your mosque. And you offered me life if I would trample upon the cross which Christians hold to be the symbol of their faith and kiss the Koran."

"Yes, yes. And you embraced the faith."

"Well, I have come to tell you something. But not here! Let us go there, and I will then tell you what I have travelled many days to say."

For some time there was much wild talk, but presently Ibrahim led the way to the place Carew had indicated, while a great crowd of wild-eyed shrieking men and boys thronged around Carew as he followed him.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### HOW CAREW PLAYED THE GAME

AFTER a time Bamfield Carew reached the spot where, a few months before, he had stood with Sir Richard Winscombe, while the motley crowd waited around, eager to know what he would tell them. Carew saw the same wild look of excitement in their eyes that he had seen then, and he knew that it needed but little to arouse them to the same unreasoning passion which had led them to demand his death. He could not help realizing that he was beyond the zone of civilization. These Arabs were but little influenced by the forces which govern civilized communities. In reality they were only savage children, and were the creatures of every passing passion. He knew, too, that no help would reach him. He had chosen to place himself in the power of this horde of fanatical Arabs, because, as he had said, "he wanted to play the game."

He knew that if the worldly wise knew his motives in coming, they would call him a madman, yet he did not hesitate. When he had been there before, he had committed an act which even then had been distasteful, but which, as time had passed by, had been revealed to him as something to be despised. Since the night on which he had heard the testimonies in Father Whitman's mission, he had seen it in still another light. Not only his desire to "play the game," but something deeper and holier, and which could not be expressed in words, demanded that he must confess the Lord he had denied. He must confess his faith in the One on whose cross he had trampled.

He was perfectly calm. He knew that in all probability he would never live to see the light of another day, but he had nothing to do with that. He must do the thing he had set out to do. He heard the Arabs panting around him, he heard them whispering excitedly to each other. Doubtless they wondered why he had come among them again, wondered what he had to say to them. Especially was the old Sheikh excited beyond measure. Perhaps memories of the other scene came back to him. Then all lusted for his death because he, with his friend, had committed sacrilege in their holy place.

The Arabs were nearly all armed. Some had knives, while others carried antiquated muskets; they were friendly for the moment, but he knew what would happen the moment he told them what was in his heart.

Ismayl had kept close to him all through the journey; evidently Ismayl remembered the night on which Carew had escaped from Tel Moloch, and desired to be his friend. He noticed, also, that the young Arab endeavoured to make the others think well of him.

Westward stood the great range of mountains, but eastward was the interminable stretch of desert. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the summer sun scorched the ground on which they stood. Not very far away stood the great mosque which, according to the belief of the Arabs, he and Sir Richard Winscombe had defiled.

"You wonder why I have come back here," said Carew quietly, while a hundred pairs of glittering eyes rested on him. "You thought when I left you, that I should never return. I thought so, too. But I have come back to tell you something. You remember that evening when we all stood here before. My friend and I, not thinking we were breaking any of your laws, were trying to remove the stones of Moab from the mosque yonder, and you pounced upon us."

At this there was a grunt of assent. Some whispered one to another, while others took a step nearer to him so as not to miss a word.

"According to you," went on Carew quietly, "we had done a deed which would call down the wrath of God, a deed which could only be expiated by our acceptance of your

faith, or by blood. My friend refused to accept your faith. You remember that ? ”

“ *Iowa ! Iowa !* ” they panted excitedly.

“ He was a brave man,” went on Carew ; “ he believed in the Christian religion, and he would not renounce it to save his life. But I did not believe. I believed in nothing. And I, to save my life, said I would deny the Christian faith. I was a coward ! I did not realize it at the time, but I was. I trampled on the cross to save my life.”

The crowd of Arabs crept nearer and nearer, and as Carew spoke he heard them whispering angrily one to another. As yet they did not seem to realize the purport of his words.

“ I want to say this,” he went on. “ I believe that your Koran is a good book. I believe your Prophet Mohammed was a great man : but since I was here I have learnt to believe in Jesus Christ. I want to confess Him here, and now. I believe that He is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. I never was a Mohammedan, but now I am trying to be a Christian. My confession to you that I was a Mohammedan was a lie, it was a coward’s confession. But I do believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of men, and I am come here to confess the Lord whom I denied.”

They understood now, and they shouted madly.

“ Let him burn in the pit of flame for ever and ever ! ”

“ May all those dear to him suffer everlastingly ! ”

“ Drive a knife into his heart ! ”

“ He hath brought the curse of Allah upon us ! ”

“ The plague came to us because Allah was angry, and because we did not put this liar to death ! ”

“ He must die before the sun goes down ! ”

This and more they cried madly, while some of the older men had drawn their knives, and were licking their lips as if in anticipation of the pleasure they would feel when their knives found their way into the young man’s body. Others were lifting their hands to heaven, and were calling down maledictions upon his head. Others, again, were praying that Allah would forgive them for not killing him at the time when his sin was first known. Still no man touched him. They had gathered close to him with murder in their eyes, but evidently they waited for a word of command. Carew

noticed, however, that Ismayl stayed on the outskirts of the crowd, and that he seemed to be trying to make signs.

"It can't be long now," thought the young man; "evidently they mean to kill me. Well, it was what I expected; but I could do no other. A man must play the game fairly."

"Silence!" said Ibrahim, the old Sheikh, whose voice had saved him from death when he and Sir Richard Winscombe had been in the Beit Allah months before. "Silence, my children, while we inquire further into this matter."

There was a look of savage gloating in his eyes. Perhaps he thought of pleasing the God whom he believed the young Englishman had outraged. Perhaps he remembered that Carew had refused to enrich him by escaping from Tel Moloch after he had offered him his daughter for his wife.

"I have always pleaded for mercy," he continued, looking around, "especially since years of wisdom have come upon me, and my blood has ceased to run hot as it ran in the days of my youth. But methinks I acted foolishly when I restrained you from driving your knives into this unbeliever's heart many moons ago, when we found him with the other infidel stealing our sacred stones. Still, that all men may know that I obey the Koran, wherein it saith: 'Be slow to pass judgment, and be wise in searching out truth,' I will e'en ask this infidel further questions."

At this there was a growl of anger.

"Ibrahim is like a woman in that he desires much speech!" cried one.

"His mouth is full of empty words!" cried another.

"He thinks he will be Sheikh ul Islam by appearing to be wise!" said still another.

"Do not fear, my dears," said Ibrahim, who had noted their angry looks, "the anger of Allah shall be turned aside. What saith the sacred Book of the faithful, 'the sins of my people cannot be remitted unless blood be shed,' and verily this infidel's blood shall be shed before the sun goes down, if indeed he be an infidel."

Then turning to Carew he said, "Why have you come here again?"

"I have come to tell you what I have told you," he replied.

"You came to tell us that you deny our Lord Mohammed, and that you believe in the false faith of the Nazarene?"

"I am come to tell you this," replied Carew. "I did not believe in Christ when I stood on this spot before, I believed in nothing. I was blind, blind—an infidel. It was nothing to me to deny Christ, and I pretended to accept your faith to save my life. Since then I have found the Lord Christ, and I could not help coming back to confess Him on the place where I denied Him. That is all."

"My children, what shall become of him?"

"He must die!" shouted the crowd.

"Then I give my consent to his death," said Ibrahim. "He hath kissed our sacred Book, he hath been taught our faith and we offered him a home amongst us. And yet he hath rejected our kindness and hath again embraced the false faith of the Nazarene. Therefore hath the plague fallen upon us, and that the anger of Allah may be appeased, and that a worse thing may not befall us, I give my consent to his death."

"It is well spoken," cried many, "let me strike the blow, Father Ibrahim!"

But here a voice was heard above the mutterings of the crowd.

"God is great, and Mohammed is his prophet," said Ismayl, and he found his way to Carew's side. "I pray not only at the appointed times, but also by night," he went on. "No man hath dared to doubt my faith in Allah, and young as I am, I have made my pilgrimage to Mecca and I have paid my vows in the Eed al Kurban. My father's fathers have lived at Tel Moloch, and I have taken to wife the daughter of Ibrahim, therefore I claim to speak."

The crowd was silent, for Ismayl was well spoken of among the people and known to all as a brave man.

"According to you this Nazarene is worthy of death," he said, "but by our law we have not the power to slay him."

"Why? why?" cried many.

"Because the Sheikh ul Islam is not here. Abou Bazouki hath gone but a day's journey and may return before the sun goes down. It is well known to you that Ibrahim only acts in his stead when he hath taken long journeys."

"Then what would you?" they yelled.

"I would wait until Abou Bazouki, appointed Sheikh ul Islam, returns," replied Ismayl, "else trouble will follow."

"Ay, and will not the wrath of Allah fall meanwhile?" cried Ibrahim; "for this Nazarene is not like an ordinary infidel. Months ago he sought to steal our sacred stones, for the which he deserved death. Yet because he renounced the false faith and accepted the true we forgave him and made much of him. We forgave him, I say, and heaped kindness upon him, yet did he escape from us, and then Allah sent us a plague. Now he comes to us and he tells us that his acceptance of our faith was only mockery. What would Allah have us do?"

"Kill him! Kill him!" yelled the crowd.

"Ay," went on Ibrahim, "he hath not only defiled our sacred places, but after having professed his faith in our Lord Mohammed, and after having been instructed in the Koran, he hath actually come back to tell us that he denies our Lord and embraces the false faith of the Nazarene. Is not Allah angry? Is not the sun going down in blood? Shall we wait for Abou Bazouki before we appease Allah's wrath?"

"No, no, let him die! Let me strike the blow!" cried many. "We will not wait for Abou Bazouki. He may not return for many days, and meanwhile the wrath of God will fall."

"I have something else to say," said Ismayl, "I, who am the son of a brave man, I who speak to the sons of brave men. We have all fought good fights; not long ago we met that band of marauders from the Valley called El Ben Runhn, and some of our brothers never saw the sunlight again, but they are gone to Paradise because they were brave men. And you and I, brothers, we love a brave man, even as we despise a coward. Is not that true?"

"*Iowa! Iowa!*" they shouted; "we love a brave man."

"And is not this Nazarene a brave man?" cried Ismayl. "Let us think, and as we are brave, let us be wise. Ibrahim said that the plague fell upon us because we had angered Allah by not slaying the Nazarenes. Yet the medicine man who travelled from Damascus told us that the plague was because the water we drank was fouled by the filth of our town which ran into it. We cleaned the water and the plague stayed. Have I not spoken truly?"

At this there was silence, yet some nodded their heads unwillingly.

“Then the wrath of Allah did not fall because we failed to kill the Nazarenes. And is not this Nazarene brave? Did we not love him when he lived with us? I say we did. But more, my brothers. Let us remember that he is not like those of us who have been reared in the true faith; therefore allowances must be made. And another thing, my brave brothers, you who always love a brave man, even when he is your enemy. Is not the Nazarene brave? Why did he come here? To tell us what he believes he ought to tell. Did he expect smiles or kind words? Nay, he knew that it would be in your hearts to kill him, yet he came freely to tell us what he hath told us. Is he not a brave man to do this? And would you, my brothers, who are brave men and sons of brave men, kill a man for doing a brave deed? We are sons of the desert and we hate cowards, but we have a boast that we take brave men to our hearts. Shall we, then, kill one who, feeling sure that he walked to his death, yet came because he felt he pleased Allah by coming? For this we know, my brothers, although our prophet is the true prophet, yet Jesus was a prophet, too, and both prophets revealed the same Allah to the sons of men, the one true Allah! Shall we brave men kill this brave man? For he is a brave man!”

Carew saw that Ismayl's words were having effect, and for the first time a ray of hope came into his heart. Unless Ibrahim turned their passions into another channel it might be that they would allow him to live.

“But he hath denied our Lord Mohammed!” they cried.

“My brothers,” said Ismayl, “if we went to this man's country and confessed our Lord, would they put us to death? Would they not respect us as brave men for confessing our Lord? We are men of Tel Moloch, than which none are braver. We are followers of our Lord Mohammed, he was a brave man and loved brave men. Shall we, then, kill a brave man because he is brave? If he had been a coward he would not have come here and faced our anger; but because he is brave and feared not our anger, neither did he fear death, he came to us. Brothers, I cannot believe you can put him to death!”

“No, no! Let him live, for he is a brave man!” cried many.

"But he hath denied the Prophet. What, then, will you do with him?" cried Ibrahim.

"Let him pay a ransom of a hundred pieces of English gold and let him go back to his own people," said a voice from the outskirts of the crowd.

Every eye had been fixed on Carew and Ismayl while the latter had been speaking, and no one had noticed the coming of an old man with long hair and beard; nevertheless he had joined the crowd and listened to Ismayl's words.

"Ismayl hath spoken truly," he said, as he moved to Carew's side.

"The Sheikh ul Islam, it is Abou Bazouki!" they murmured.

"But he is an infidel; he hath come here to deny the prophet," said Ibrahim.

"Alas! many do that," said Abou Bazouki; "and as you say, this man hath committed a grievous sin. Yet he is a brave man, a man such as our Lord Mohammed would have loved. Therefore it is not in my heart to kill such as he in cold blood. Therefore it is my will that he pay a ransom and go free."

"Yes, let him pay a ransom and go free? He is a brave man!" cried the crowd.

Then Carew realized, as he had never realized before, the nobleness of the Arab nature. They were far from saints, they gloried in unclean things, they stole and they lied, yet when Ismayl had appealed to their chivalry, to their love and honour for bravery, they had responded to his appeal. He had never thought of bravery when he made up his mind to come thither, he had never dreamed that his action would be taken in that light, but now he knew that while his desire to confess his Lord had brought him into danger, his coming there had also won the honour of a people who loved a brave man.

Scarcely had this thought passed through his mind than another shout of excitement arose.

"Soldiers! Soldiers!" they cried "The Nazarene is not a brave man. He came and made his confession because he knew that soldiers were near."

Carew turned, and to his surprise he saw a number of soldiers riding towards them. For a moment he was confounded as to the meaning of this, but at least he would

make known the truth to the Arabs, who looked savagely towards him.

"What these soldiers may mean I do not know," he said. "I spoke to none. I do not know from whence they came or why they come here. I came alone to tell you my story. I swear it by the great God above."

"Let us wait and we shall soon know what they desire," said Abou Bazouki, the Sheikh ul Islam.

The soldiers galloped up as though in great haste.

"What would you soldiers of his Serene Majesty?" asked the Sheikh ul Islam.

"The young Englishman who arrived here but a few hours since," cried the officer-in-charge. "The English Consul is here, and I have powers from Constantinople."

"He is here," said Abou Bazouki. "Not a hair of his head hath been injured."

"We are here in time to save his life, then?" said the officer.

"No," replied Abou Bazouki, "had we been minded to kill him you would not have been in time. But we spared his life because he is a brave man, and even although he thought he was coming to his death he still came to confess his Lord."

Many more words were said, but Carew did not hear them. For behind the soldiers he saw the face of old Father Whitman, and by his side was Joan Winscombe.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few hours later Joan Winscombe and Bamfield Carew were alone in a large tent where he had dined with the British Consul, his secretary, and Father Whitman. But these men had left them now, and so the two were alone.

"I do not understand," said Bamfield.

"What do you not understand?" she asked. There was a look in her eyes which Carew had never seen before.

"How you knew where I had gone—and why you came," he replied. "I told no one."

"Yes, you did. You told Father Whitman."

"You are mistaken," said Carew. "He was utterly ignorant of where I was going."

"I know it," said Joan. "He knew nothing; but he knew that you had found faith, for you told him, and when

he asked you what you were going to do, you told him that you were going 'to play the game.' After that I did not need to be told any more."

The girl laughed as she spoke; evidently she was very happy.

"But—but," stammered Carew, "I never dreamed that this would give an inkling of what I meant to do. Besides, I fully expected that I should be dead before—you would see him, Father Whitman, again."

"We returned to England sooner than I imagined we should," replied Joan, "and—well, I went to see Father Whitman immediately on my return. You see, I wondered whether——"

"What?" asked Carew, when he saw that she hesitated.

"How you were getting on with your work," she laughed.

"Then when he told me what had happened and what you said when you left him, I knew what you would do."

"How did you know?"

"Well, I had learnt to know you."

"Then you——"

"I went to my father and told him and asked him to come with me. But he couldn't, he was not strong enough. Whereupon I told him I was going, alone and then—then he insisted upon Father Whitman coming with me."

"But—but——"

"Surely there are no more 'buts'?" she said. "I came to Jerusalem not long after you left. We travelled quickly, having gone by train to Brindisi. I went to the British Consul—who—who—arranged for soldiers, and when I insisted on coming, too, he said that both he and his secretary would join us. He is a good man."

"But why should you come?" asked Carew. He was trying to understand what her words meant, the events of the last few hours had bewildered him.

She looked at him steadily, and again Carew saw the bright light in her eyes, a light he had never seen until that night.

"Surely you know," she said, and again she laughed.

"Is—is it that?" he stammered, and his voice was tremulous with fear and hope.

She nodded her head.

"Tell me, Joan, tell me in so many words. I love you like my own life. You are all the world to me. Did you come because you cared for me?"

Again she nodded her head. She seemed unable to speak.

"Oh! thank God," he cried. "I did not dare to hope for such a thing. But, Joan, what did you mean by—by telling me what you did at Cannes?"

"I did not know then."

"Did not know what?"

"I did not know what a brave man you were. I—I had all along believed you to be a coward. Then when Father Whitman told me—what he did—I—I knew everything. Father wanted to send instructions to the British Consul from London, but I insisted on going myself. I—I wanted to tell you myself that I believed in you, and I knew——"

"Knew what?" asked Carew feverishly.

"What—what you said you wanted me to tell you," she said.

"But Father Whitman said you were engaged to Tren-grove!"

"I never thought of him in that way. How could I?" she replied.

Carew did not speak a word. He simply looked at her in wonder.

"I wanted to ask your forgiveness, too," she went on. "I wanted to tell you that I knew before I left London that you were what the old Sheikh has said you were."

"What?"

"A brave man. When I knew that I knew—all the rest."

Father Whitman and the British Consul entered the tent, followed by the latter's secretary. For a few minutes they conversed together, then Joan and Carew left the tent and stood under the open sky. It was a moonless night, but the stars were wonderful. Never in his life had Carew seen a sight which impressed him so much. All around stretched the mountains, while beyond the mountains eastward was the great Mosque of Tel Moloch.

"Is it not wonderful," he said. "I shall thank God to the last day of my life that I came here."

"Yes," she said. "Listen to the silence."

"No, not silence," he answered; "I seem to hear angels' voices everywhere."

"That first awful experience here led to your faith, didn't it?" she said.

"It has led to everything—everything, since you will be my wife, Joan."

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